ST. ALB IBRARY

23-13877
3.00

[illegible] LIBRARY [illegible]

AN AMERICAN APOSTLE

Nihil obstat:

Fr. Hugo J. McManus, O.P.

Fr. Alfredus B. Saylor, O.P., S.T. Lr.

Imprimatur:

Fr. Raymundus Meagher, O.P., S.T.Lr., LL.D.
Prior Provincialis.

Nihil obstat:

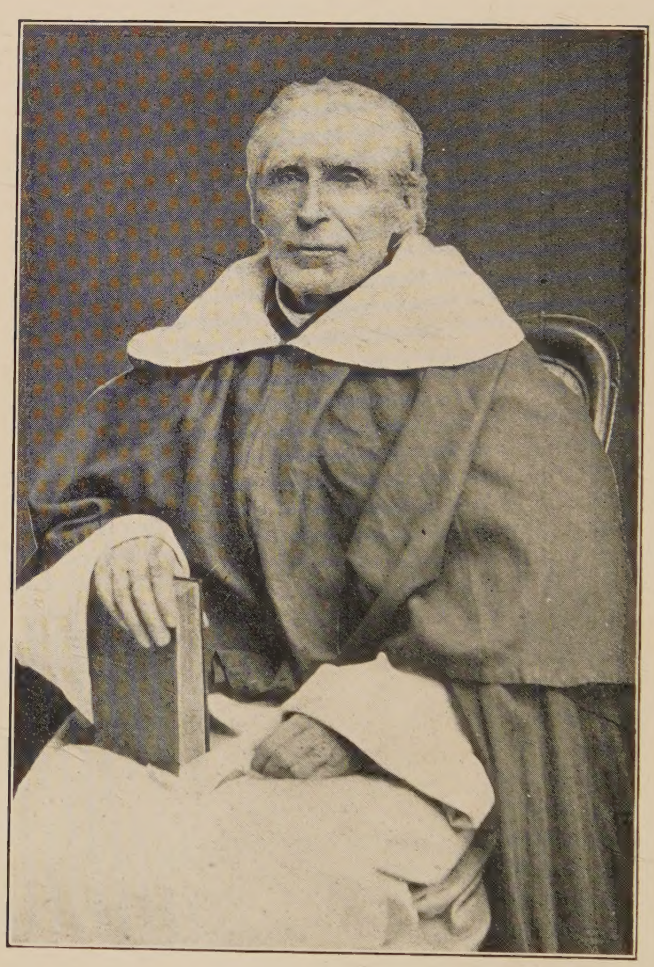
Rmus Cornelius F. Thomas, Prot., Apos.,
S.T.L., J.C.D., LL.D.

Imprimatur:

✠Michael J. Curley, D.D.
Archiepiscopus Baltimorensis,
Baltimorae, die Januarii 29, 1923.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/americanapostle0000very



VERY REV. MATTHEW A. O'BRIEN, O. P.

AN AMERICAN APOSTLE

THE VERY REVEREND

MATTHEW ANTHONY O'BRIEN, O.P.

MODEL PRIEST AND RELIGIOUS, PROMOTER OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION, TIRELESS AND FRUITFUL HARVESTER OF SOULS IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

ST. ALBERT'S COLLEGE LIBRARY

BY

VERY REV. VICTOR F. O'DANIEL, O.P., S.T.M.

AUTHOR OF "VERY REV. CHARLES H. McKENNA"
"RIGHT REV. EDWARD D. FENWICK"
"THE DOMINICAN LAY BROTHERS," ETC.

THE DOMINICANA
487 Michigan Avenue, N. E.
WASHINGTON, D. C.

Copyright, 1923
By V. F. O'Daniel, O. P.

TO

THE PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS

OF THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

WHO

WILL FIND MUCH TO ADMIRE

IN THE LIFE OF FATHER O'BRIEN

AND MUCH

THAT WILL INSPIRE

CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
	Foreword	xiii
I.	The O'Briens and the Meaghers	1
II.	Birthplace and Boyhood	8
III.	Early Experiences in the United States	19
IV.	Professor, Student, Reception of the Habit	29
V.	In the Novitiate	40
VI.	Profession, Studies and Ordination	51
VII.	First Years in the Priesthood	62
VIII.	In Ohio	74
IX.	Pastor of Saint Patrick's	86
X.	Journey Abroad, Provincial	117
XI.	Prior and Pastor at Saint Rose's	154
XII.	Various Occupations	185
XIII.	In London, Canada	209
XIV.	A Multiplicity of Labors	236
XV.	A Resume	263
XVI.	Last Years of Labor	286
XVII.	Death and Burial	304
XVIII.	A Character Study	318
	Bibliography	329
	Index	333

ILLUSTRATIONS

PAGE

VERY REV. MATTHEW A. O'BRIEN ..... *Frontispiece*

SAINT ROSE'S CHURCH AND PRIORY, NEAR SPRINGFIELD, KENTUCKY, IN 1835 35

SAINT PATRICK'S CHURCH, JUNCTION CITY, OHIO 105

INTERIOR OF SAINT PATRICK'S CHURCH 105

SAINT JOSEPH'S COLLEGE AND CONVENT BUILT BY FATHER O'BRIEN 129

SAINT DOMINIC'S CHURCH, MCCLUNY, OHIO 133

SAINT PIUS' CHURCH ON SOUTH FORK CREEK, OHIO 133

THE FIRST SAINT DOMINIC'S CHURCH, WASHINGTON, D. C... 143

FATHER O'BRIEN WHEN PROVINCIAL 143

SAINT ROSE'S CHURCH, IN KENTUCKY, BUILT BY FATHER O'BRIEN 195

INTERIOR OF SAINT ROSE'S CHURCH 195

FATHER O'BRIEN AS HE APPEARED IN CANADA 233

FATHER O'BRIEN IN HIS LAST YEARS 315

WHERE FATHER O'BRIEN IS BURIED 315

FOREWORD

Years ago, during a visit at the Dominican priory, Cork, Ireland, the writer noticed the words *"Colligite quae superaverunt fragmenta, ne pereant"* (Gather up the fragments that remain, lest they be lost) posted on the door of a closet at one end of the recreation room. An inquiry brought forth the information that the venerable Father Bartholomew Russell had converted the recess into an archive, and fastened the wise counsel to its entrance. We were struck and amused by this use of the Scriptural text, for it was the first time that we had ever seen it given such an application.

A little more than two years since, the Rev. Ralph H. Dignan, who was then gathering material for the history of the Diocese of London, Ontario, wrote to ask for data on the Dominican Fathers once engaged in that episcopal city. Eleven months later, while preparing a sketch of Father O'Brien, the first superior of the erstwhile Canadian community, Father Russell's prudent advice not only came back to mind, but even took possession of it. It seemed almost criminal to let the memory of so holy a priest and so zealous a worker in the Lord's vineyard be buried in oblivion; or to suffer posterity to go without a knowledge of a life from which it could hardly fail to derive much edification and inspiration.

Thus the sketch of the American apostle for Father Dignan was followed by a lengthy article on him. But

this did not satisfy. In fact, it only strengthened the appeal of *"Colligite fragmenta, ne pereant."* No doubt the force of the call was made the greater by a knowledge that many had often expressed a wish that Father O'Brien's biography should be written. At any rate, it was under these circumstances that we conceived the idea and formed the resolution of undertaking the book which is now placed before the public.

Whilst documents relating to the former missionary were so scarce as to render the task well-nigh impossible, had one to depend solely on these, not a few notes had been taken from talks with old people about him and his work. Indeed, we had heard him spoken of time and time again from earliest childhood, and in this way had become saturated, if we may be allowed the expression, with the rich traditionary lore that clusters around his venerated name. Thirty or even twenty years ago a biographer might easily have collected enough of this to fill a portly volume.

From the sources at hand the apostolic man's life-story was first thrown into tentative shape. Then many months were devoted to travel and search through the principal centers of his labors in Kentucky, Ohio and Canada. Church and conventual records yielded a measure of helpful data. A few letters were discovered here and there. Old acquaintances of the noted missionary, a surprising number of whom still lived, revealed new facts, as well as served to refreshen the memory on others that had been known before. Some were kind enough to put their recollections in writing. All in all, the effort to gather material for the proposed book was rewarded even beyond expectation.

The data thus obtained was now carefully collated.

All conflicting statements were set aside as unreliable. Nor did we adjudge any account competent for use, unless confirmed by more than one testimony, or sustained by other proof that brought conviction. The outlines of the story were then recast, and filled in with the additional facts collected on our journeys.

Judgment on the merits of the work must, of course, be left to the reader. Yet we venture to believe that many will not only be pleased with its tale, but will also derive benefit from its pages. It ought, in the writer's candid opinion, prove especially acceptable to the clergy, to religious communities, whether of men or women, and to pious-minded persons in the world. However, we trust, the general reader and the historian will likewise be liberally compensated for a perusal of its contents. If the volume but perpetuate the memory of a saintly priest who served God with his whole heart and soul, deserved well of our American Church, and toiled with all his might for the salvation of his fellowman, the time and labor given to it will not have been spent in vain.

Grateful acknowledgement is extended to all those who, by advice or otherwise, contributed towards the successful issue of the work. The Revs. Dennis J. Dunne of Junction City, Ohio, and James S. Wilburn, O.P., of Saint Rose's Priory, near Springfield, Kentucky, have placed us under a debt of gratitude for their time and assistance in visiting the old people of their respective rural neighborhoods.

Thanks are also due, for their kindly interest, to the ecclesiastical censors whose names appear on the *"imprimatur"* page. Nor should we overlook another confrère, Rev. Peter T. McAllister. The painstaking care of all these friends in reading the manuscript is treasured

beyond expression. Only those who have had experience in matters of this character can fully realize how much such favors mean. Father McAllister, besides the time he was a novice and student in Kentucky, spent several years as a priest in Ohio. In both states he lived among people who knew the subject of our narrative well. Father McManus, one of the censors, has the honor of being the senior member of Saint Joseph's Province of Dominicans, and is thoroughly conversant with its traditions.

V. F. O'Daniel, O.P.

The Dominican House of Studies,
Catholic University of America,
Feast of Saint Thomas of Aquin,
Washington, D. C., March 7, 1923.

An American Apostle

CHAPTER I

THE O'BRIENS AND THE MEAGHERS

Ireland, as every reader knows, is divided into four provinces. Ulster includes the northeastern part of the island, and Leinster is in the southeastern corner. Similarly, Connaught embraces the northwest, while noble Munster, the largest of the provinces, lies to the southwest.

For centuries the country was governed by a number of petty rulers who bore the title of *righ,* or king. The chief seats of government for the provinces were long Emania, near Armagh, for Ulster; Leighlin for Leinster; Cruchain (now Rathcrogan, in Roscommon) for Connaught; and Cashel for Munster. Besides the four more powerful and noteworthy sovereigns, there were other princes and chiefs of lower rank who held sway in various parts of the island over sub-kingdoms. These lesser potentates were dependent on their over-lords.[1]

So again, there was an *ard-righ,* or high-king. This dignity and the power that accompanied it were reserved for the monarchs of the four provinces. But they were

[1] The facts given in this chapter, the reader needs hardly be told, are gleaned from the most authoritative histories of Ireland available.

vested in the one who could obtain the suffrages of two provinces besides his own. The high-king called and presided over national assemblages. To him the other chieftains of the island paid tribute. He was crowned at Tara, in Meath which then stretched from the Liffey on the south to Armagh on the north. Thus Tara was the chief seat of government for federal purposes. At imperial Tara convened all solemn congresses which treated of affairs that concerned the nation at large. Meath was the mensal demesne, or "board of the king's table." It was exempt from all taxation, except that of the *ard-righ,* or supreme monarch.

Although, in case of death or deposition, an Irish king or prince ordinarily found an heir to the throne in an eldest son or nephew, such near kindred could not always lay any strict claim to the right of succession. In fact, the right of succession was often regulated rather by custom than by any definite law. While a successor to a ruler was universally taken from his family, the choice of the clansmen, who had an elective vote, not unfrequently fell on a brother, cousin or other relation of the deceased chieftain.

A deformed prince was debarred from the throne by law. At times the nomination of a successor which had been obtained by an Irish king, to suit himself, was later set aside by the public voice of an elective convention. In some tribes, as in Munster for instance, the succession was supposed to alternate between a double line of princes.

It was in accordance with this latter custom, and aided by his own bravery, personal ability and ambition, that the great Brian Boru finally rose to the height of

ST. ALBERT'S COLLEGE LIBRARY

his power. Olild, from whom sprang most of the leading families in the south of Ireland, left a provision in his will arranging such an alternate succession to the throne of Cashel, in Munster. The house of Kinkora, to which Brian belonged, however, had long been excluded from the higher royal dignity, and obliged to content itself with the principality, or sub-kingdom, of Thomond.

Lactna of this line eventually made good his claim to Cashel's throne. Lorcan, his son, possibly owing to the will of Olild, was passed over in the next reign. Kennedy, Lorcan's son and heir, also asserted his right to that throne on the death of his grandfather's successor; but, at the convention gathered to choose a king for Munster, he relinquished his pretensions in favor of another claimant by the name of Kellachan.

Kennedy died in the year of our Lord 950, leaving two sons who were soon to write their names indelibly on the pages of Irish history. These were Mahon and Brian, inveterate foes of the Danish invaders. In battle after battle they defeated the unwelcome foreigner. Mahon obtained the throne of Cashel in 960. Brian, his younger brother, now succeeded him on that of Thomond. In 976 Mahon was assassinated. Two years later, having triumphed over his enemies, Brian became the undisputed ruler of Munster. Nor did he stop at this. He was the greatest statesman, possibly also the ablest general, in the country. In 1002, he compelled Malachy II, then high-king, to abdicate in his favor, and was crowned supreme monarch of Ireland at Tara.

Although some historians tell us that, by his seizure of the supreme authority, he prepared the way for the

later dissensions which divided Ireland into many factions, and for the country's final downfall, Brian is acknowledged to have been the greatest—perhaps the best—of the Irish high-kings.

He made many wise and salutary laws for the nation. His household was conducted in the most royal manner. Two of his dominant traits were munificence and hospitality. Religion received many signal benefits from Brian's reign. All churches, chapels, monasteries and convents that had been destroyed by the Danes were not merely rebuilt, but greatly aided in other ways by the generous-hearted monarch. Properties that had been confiscated by the Danish invaders were restored to their rightful owners. He has come down in history by the name of Brian Boru, or "Brian of the tributes."

Brian Boru ruled over Ireland as high-king for twelve years, crowning his sovereignty with the supreme sacrifice of his life. In 1014, he waged the historic battle of Clontarf, near Dublin, against the combined strength of Leinster and its Danish allies, who had brought forces from Denmark and other northern countries for the purpose of overcoming the powerful monarch. The contest, which was fought with the utmost bravery and ferocity on both sides, was long in doubt. But in the end Brian gained an overwhelming victory.

At Clontarf the power of the Danes in Ireland was crushed, the country thenceforth freed from their invasions. The triumph, however, was dearly bought. A party of foreigners, in flight for their ships, espied the venerable monarch, now a man of perhaps four score years, in his tent.[2] He was on his knees before a cru-

[2] Historians are not of accord as to the age of Brian Boru. Some make him less than eighty years of age at the time of his death; others tell us that he was much older.

cifix, and without a guard. Rushing upon the brave chieftain, they slew him whilst engaged in a prayer of thanksgiving to the God of victory. Morrogh and Turlogh O'Brien, respectively the eldest son and the grandson of the dead monarch, fell on the same field of battle.

It was during the great Brian Boru's reign that surnames were introduced in Ireland. One of the wise laws which he had enacted by a national assembly held at Tara required that in future the members of the leading families should assume cognomens. This was to avoid the confusion that arose from innumerable persons bearing the same baptismal name, with no distinguishing attribute.

The taking of such appellations, however, was not to be done in a haphazard manner. Each chieftain should be called after some ancestor, whose virtues should remind him of his duty and origin. It was thus that the prefixes "O" and "Mc," meaning *son* or descendant of, came to be added to the first or Christian names of the Irish, and eventually developed into patronymics. The descendants of the great *ard-righ* became O'Briens.

Denis O'Brien succeeded the supreme monarch on the throne of Cashel; but the lordly Malachy was again chosen high-king. Although some of the O'Briens later aspired to this greater dignity, none of them ever attained the undisputed mastership of Ireland. However, descendants of "Brian of the tributes" continued for centuries to be kings of Munster, Thomond and Limerick, while still others were princes or chiefs in various localities in the southwestern province of Erin. Few names appear oftener or play a more conspicuous part in the annals of the country than that of O'Brien.

They were nearly all not only true to their religion, but also loyal defenders and generous benefactors of the Church. They built and endowed temples of prayer, erected and provided for the maintenance of monasteries and convents as places of refuge for God's elect. Like their great ancestor, they were munificent in their charity. They have worn the miter with not less credit than they have worn the crown. They bore all manner of suffering and persecution for the sake of their faith and their country. Some of them sealed their holy lives with the martyrs' blood.

Few Irish families—and this is to say much—have been so fruitful as the O'Briens in vocations to the priesthood and the religious life both at home and abroad. There are today over one hundred priests of that name in the United States.[3] They have fought with bravery alike on the soil of Ireland and in the lands of their exile.

In a word, the O'Briens are a kingly, martial and priestly race that has played a conspicuous part in the affairs of both Church and State, not only in the island of their origin, but likewise in the countries in which the Irish, through transportation or migration, have found an asylum and liberty.

The Meaghers, whilst neither so numerous nor so conspicuous as the O'Briens, were also a noble Irish family of Munster.[4] They belonged principally to the present barony of Ikerin, in the northeastern part of County Tipperary. Roscrea, "The City of the Sword,"

[3] *The Catholic Directory.*

[4] The original name was O'Meachair; but it has been Anglicized into O'Meagher, Meagher and Maher.

was their chief stronghold. They, too, were a brave type, and played an important part in the history of their country.

Not less religious than patriotic, the Meaghers took a keen interest in the affairs of the Church as well as in those of the State. They have given many vocations to the priesthood and to the religious life not only in Ireland, but also in the countries of their adoption or exile. In the land of their origin they suffered heavy confiscations and underwent many trials and privations because of their faith and patriotism. Both there and abroad they have been among the bravest of the brave.

From these Irish families was descended the subject of our narrative, Father Matthew A. O'Brien, whose mother was a Meagher. His humility was such that he rarely, if ever, referred to his ancestry. His father he was seldom heard to mention. His mother's virtues, however, so it is said, were a subject on which he loved to dwell. These he himself inherited. And although he was born in what we would now consider poverty, and brought up along lines upon which we would look as hard, the future priest, in spite of his efforts to hide them, possessed many of the noble traits of his progenitors.

He was a worthy son of an illustrious race. His life is full of inspiration. It causes one to exclaim almost involuntarily: "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." [5]

[5] *Matthew*, V, 3.

CHAPTER II

BIRTHPLACE AND BOYHOOD

The tale of Ireland's conversion, her brave clans and her warlike chieftains possess an interest that is surpassed by the history of no other nation. Her fidelity to the religion of Saint Patrick and her heroism under trial and persecution for faith's sake have few, if any, parallels. The verdure of her forests and fields is all her own, whilst the beauty of her romantic mountain scenery rivals that of any part of the world. [1]

In no portion of the island does the reader or traveller meet with a greater charm of story or of nature than is found in County Tipperary, which lies in eastern Munster, and extends from Waterford, on the south, to Galway, in Connaught, at the north. The entire county presents a continuous succession of mountains, hills, valleys and rivers. It is dotted throughout its length and breadth with prosperous towns and quaint villages.

The rugged scenery is superb, the low lands fertile; while the rushing waters of the rivers combine with the blue sky to give the verdant vesture that cheerful freshness which is peculiar to an Irish landscape, and seems to

[1] The traveller in Ireland cannot fail to note the bright green and freshness that meet the eye on every side. To this, no doubt, is due the color of the Irish flag. The beauty of the country's mountain scenery is a matter of common knowledge.

greet the stranger with a hearty welcome. The people are honest and courteous, hospitable and industrious, their language either Gaelic or a soft English not unlike that so characteristic of the City of Dublin. What is more, they are deeply religious. No part of the country is more Catholic than is Tipperary. Nor has any county of Ireland suffered more for its religion or its patriotism. All this, no doubt, is the reason why some of the most touching Irish poetry and fiction has been written on Tipperary, its warriors, peasantry and scenery.

In Ireland north is always "down," and south is always "up." This explains why the barony of Ormond, which lies in the extreme north of Tipperary, is called "Lower Ormond," while that which borders on the south of this domain bears the title of "Upper Ormond." These baronies were created in late years, and their names were misapplied, for all Lower Ormond, together with a good part of Upper Ormond, belonged to the house of Thomond, over which the O'Briens long reigned as rulers. Ormond was a different sub-kingdom which lay farther to the east and south. The romantic remains of Ormond Castle may still be seen at Carrick-on-Suir, in the extreme southeastern corner of County Tipperary.[2]

On the southern border of Lower Ormond is the town of Nenagh. It is situated on a river of the same name, a gentle stream that draws its head waters partly from the Devil's Bit, and partly from the slopes of the Kimalta Mountains, and then courses its way northwesterly, by the city, until it falls into Lough Derg, about eight

[2] *Atlas and Cyclopedia of Ireland* (Tipperary: Ancient Divisions and Designations); the *Rosary Magazine*, January, 1912.

miles distant. Nenagh is one of the most prosperous towns in Tipperary.

The soil of the neighborhood is extremely fertile, the location of the city beautiful and picturesque. Mountain scenery meets the eye on every side. Some ten miles to the southwest, in the present Barony of Owney and Ara, also formerly belonging to the O'Briens, rises a peak named Kimalta, but known by the people as Keeper Hill. It is a splendid dome nearly three thousand feet in height, and stands like a sentinel overlooking the country far and wide. Near the northern boundary of Upper Ormond, perhaps three miles from Nenagh in the direction of Keeper Hill, is situated the quaint little village of Bawn, to which the reader must now be introduced.

All this country was once the fair domain of the house of Thomond. Through skillful diplomacy, coupled with their bravery and power, many of the O'Briens seem to have managed long to maintain a part of their properties, even in the penal days when the Catholics of Ireland were sorely tried, and their estates ruthlessly confiscated. Among these appear to have been the O'Briens of Ara, a district between Lough Derg and Keeper Hill. This house holds an important place in the annals of Munster. Under its standard of the Triple Lion were fought many battles; around its name clusters much romantic history. It is from it that the subject of our biography was descended. [3]

O'Brien of Ara was not only a prominent man in his day, but likewise a chieftain with numerous clansmen, kinsmen and retainers. In the first stanza of his well-

[3] *The Nenagh News*, February 1, 1913 (Article: Father O'Brien of Bawn, Nenagh).

known poem entitled "O'Brien of Ara," Thomas Davis writes:

> Tall are the towers of O'Ceinneidigh—
> Broad are the lands of MacCarrthaigh—
> Desmond feeds five hundred men a day;
> Yet, here's to O'Brien of Ara!
> Up from the Castle of Druim-aniar,
> Down from the top of Camailte,
> Clansman and kinsman are coming here
> To give him the CEAD MILE FAILTE.

But, as with the rest of the Irish gentry who remained faithful to the religion brought them by Saint Patrick, the crushing hand of tyranny eventually fell upon the O'Briens of Ara, and robbed them of their possessions. Perhaps it is of the last of the line to hold sway there that Michael O'Meara speaks, when he tells us, in the *Nenagh News,* that one of the grandsons of O'Brien of Ara was named James.[4]

Be this as it may, the same authority informs us that to this James O'Brien were born three sons, Denis, Daniel and John. Denis went to live at Hogan's Pass; Daniel settled in Kilmore; whilst John took up his residence in the village of Bawn, where he erected a distillery. He married a Miss Grace Meagher of a nearby town called Toomyvara. From this union, it appears, issued thirteen children, three of whom died in their youth. Of the sons who attained manhood the youngest

[4] *Ibid.* The writer of this letter signs himself: "M. O'Meara." But we know that he was Michael O'Meara, a native of Nenagh, and long a resident of Cincinnati, Ohio. Just as the last of our manuscript was being made ready for the press word was received that he had gone to spend the remainder of his life with his son in Kansas City, Missouri. He was a friend of Father O'Brien in this country, and knew his relations in Ireland.

was Matthew, the future Dominican missionary in America, whose life and labors are sketched in these pages. [5]

Matthew O'Brien first saw the light of day at Bawn, in May, 1804. [6] The month of his birth is the most charming season in Ireland. It is then that the wavy meadows and grain are in bloom, the heath and flowers in first blossom, and the hawthorn whiter than snow, great hedges of which skirt the fields and the roadside far as eye can see.

Hill, valley and mountain present landscape after landscape of gayest green, through which peep blossom and bloom of every hue. The finch, the thrush, the lark fill the air with music not less sweet than the aroma wafted from the wild rose that grows luxuriantly in every direction. All nature is aglow with life; it seems in joy. The May of 1804, in northern Tipperary,

[5] Mr. O'Meara (see the two preceding notes), from whom the facts given in this paragraph are taken, tells us that there were ten children. Tradition, however, has it that Father O'Brien used often to tell of the large family to which he belonged; and that he was wont playfully to remark that the children were the unlucky number of thirteen. The same number is given in an obituary notice of the saintly priest in the *Catholic Advocate*, Louisville, Kentucky, February 4, 1871. From this we conclude that three must have died in infancy or early youth.

[6] The *Freeman's Journal* of February 4, 1871, which seems for the most part accurate in the sketch of the Dominican's life, gives May, 1802 as the date of his birth. But his own statement at the time of his religious profession, September 8, 1837, that he was then thirty-three years of age shows this to be an error—probably typographical. The *Catholic Advocate* of February 4, 1871, tells us that he was born "during the turbulent times of 1798;" while a notice of his death (January 15, 1871) in the Profession Book of Saint Rose's, in Kentucky, says he died in the seventy-second year of his age. These assertions would make him born in 1799 at the latest. However, it seems to us, in view of his own very explicit declaration of his age in 1837, they cannot be accepted. So again, the family Bible of Denis O'Brien in possession of his son Timothy, Columbus, Ohio, gives March 22, 1798, as the date of his birth; and we were told that there were several children between Denis and Matthew.

was as if prophetic of the pure and beautiful life that was to be lived by the youngest son of John O'Brien who was then born by the waters of the Nenagh.

Of the future priest's early life but little is known. We are told, however, that from his childhood he was much given to piety, and showed a retiring disposition. This we can readily believe, if his life as a man and as a minister of God may be considered an outgrowth of that of his youth. Doubtless his character was largely an inheritance from his pious mother, for whom he ever entertained the profoundest affection.

John O'Brien's business was perhaps one of the most lucrative to which the Catholics in Ireland could aspire in his day and generation. It was one of the few occupations which protected one of his faith from the pangs of hunger. But, with the widespread poverty which then prevailed in the country, comfortably to support so large a family must have demanded rigid economy. Yet, there is every reason to believe, John O'Brien gave his children a good rudimentary education—the best that could be procured under the hapless circumstances.

In consequence of England's misgovernment, the blight of illiteracy still bore heavily on Ireland at the time of Father O'Brien's birth. Even among those descended from the chieftains and the best Catholic families of Erin, which had once been a nation of scholars as well as an island of saints, there were many who could neither read nor write. The country was just emerging from the effects of a long period of oppression and intellectual darkness. It still suffered from the turbulent days of 1798, still groaned under the weight of iniquitous laws.

During the poverty and turmoil of the penal years from Henry VIII to William of Orange Catholic education in Ireland was a difficult matter. Catholic parents, when they had the means, sent their children abroad that they might be educated without danger to their faith, a practice which continued even after the severe edict issued against it by Lord Deputy Chichester, in 1610. Bishops who could afford it placed their candidates for the priesthood in continental seminaries. Young men, with the fire of ambition or zeal burning in their breasts, often made their own way to various countries that they might receive an education or become one of the Lord's anointed to labor for the salvation of souls either at home or in foreign lands.

Late in the same century (the seventeenth), Catholic schools were proscribed in Ireland under the heaviest penalties. Catholics were even forbidden to exercise the office of teacher. These enactments gave birth to the historic hedge-schools of the island, wherein more than one Irish scholar and statesman entered upon the path of learning and greatness.

Braving the tyrant and his relentless laws, poor Catholic parents, in an effort to educate their beloved little ones, placed them under the care of a schoolmaster who stealthily taught them behind some protecting hedge, or hidden away in a remote glen. While classes were held, guards were on watch to give warning of the approach of bailiff or spy. Doubtless it was in such a school, or in the privacy of their homes, that Father O'Brien's parents learned the Three R's. It was a bold and difficult method of education, yet the only one open to the poor Catholics of Ireland at that period.

Nor was any relief obtained from this tyranny until 1782, when an act was passed allowing the erection of a Catholic school with the consent of the Protestant bishop of the diocese. One may imagine how often such an unfriendly ecclesiastic refused his approval. Ten years later, however, this act was followed by another which permitted Catholics to erect schools without the episcopal consent. At first, for the people were in the throes of dire poverty, these humble educational establishments rose slowly. The people built them with their own hands, and placed them by the roadsides. The walls were of earthen sods, the roof of thatch. In default of a stove, a peat fire burned in the center of the room during the winter months. An opening in the roof took the place of a chimney. The floor was the bare earth, while stones or blocks of wood served as seats alike for teacher and pupils.

The master received little fees, but the parents of his charges supplied him liberally with meal, potatoes, bacon and turf. They entertained him royally at their homes. Although they could offer him but small remuneration, their gratitude, no less than their magnanimous spirit of hospitality, made them give of their best.[7]

Such was the school which little Matthew O'Brien first attended in northern Tipperary. Perhaps, before starting, he had learned the alphabet and a little more under the fond care of his pious mother. It was an humble beginning for an O'Brien. No doubt, when he had finished the first grades under this thatched roof, he was sent to the higher school in Nenagh, as the family pride of the father must have made him anxious

[7] The facts we have been recording are matters of common Irish history.

to do all he could for his children. Matthew we may rest assured—for there is every reason for believing that he early set his heart on higher things than those of earth—did not fail to take advantage of every opportunity that was offered him.

These chances, however, seem to have been scant enough. Apart from the short sessions, the Irish lad's studies were doubtless often interrupted by the necessity of helping his father in the distillery or his brothers in the fields. Possibly, too, the needs of the family at times demanded that he should find employment with the neighbors. Be this as it may, by dint of industry, he succeeded in obtaining a good rudimentary education that enabled him to teach the lower classes at a college on his arrival in America.

Little more is known of Matthew O'Brien's school days in Ireland. Yet it has come down to us that he was an example to the other youths. His own conduct was ever of the best, and the boy who did wrong, or used improper language, was sure not only to incur his displeasure, but also to receive his gentle, still a positive, reprimand. [8]

As the years wore on, one of Matthew's sisters married a man by the name of Young, who lived at Shallee; another, Grace, wedded Richard Burke of Bawn; while a third entered into the conjugal state with James McGrath, a hardware merchant in Nenagh, and became the mother of Father Matthew F. McGrath, O.P., who died in Ohio, in 1870. Still another girl, Margaret, espoused one John Hogan.

Denis married Honora Ryan, one of whose brothers,

[8] The *Nenagh News*, February 17, 1918.

Joseph T. Ryan, afterwards entered the Order of Saint Dominic and labored for years on the missions in Kentucky; whilst Philip wedded a Miss Catherine Madden, and became the father of the late Rev. Charles C. O'Brien of the diocese of Peoria, Illinois. Daniel, the eldest child, took a non-Catholic English lady unto wife, and as a consequence long neglected his religion to the no little sorrow of the family. However, he was afterwards converted by Matthew. Of the remaining brothers or sisters of the future great Friar Preacher we have been able to obtain no information. [9]

Meanwhile, Matthew O'Brien cultivated his spirit of prayer and piety, and doubtless prayed that God would give him the means of realizing his vocation. A writer in the *Catholic Advocate,* Louisville, Kentucky, seems to doubt whether the young Irishman entertained any thought of the priesthood when he came to America. [10] Yet, in spite of this, it appears quite certain not only that such an idea had filled his mind from tender youth, but also that he had a positive longing thus to consecrate himself to God and the salvation of souls. That he came to the United States with this purpose in view may be seen from the steps which he took almost immediately on reaching our shores.[11] So does a writer in the *Nenagh News* who knew his family in Ireland, and was a friend of the Friar Preacher himself, tell us:

A vocation to the priesthood began to develop at a very early period. He often expressed the hope that he would one day become

[9] The *Nenagh News* as above, and relations and friends.
[10] *Catholic Advocate,* February 4, 1871.
[11] The *Freeman's Journal,* February 4, 1871.

a priest. The prospect, however, of having this earnest desire of his heart realized in Ireland seemed very dim. The thought grew on him that his only hope of becoming a priest was to emigrate to the United States. He had frequent conversations with his mother on this important subject. At last it was decided that he should emigrate. "Go, then, Matthew," says his pious mother, "and God will direct you." [12]

Tradition represents this Christian woman as an admirable character and a model Catholic parent. She must indeed have been greatly beloved, for her funeral cortège was three miles in length. [13] More than likely it was Matthew's filial affection for her, together with her reluctance to part with her favorite child, that detained him so long from putting his pious design into execution. Be that as it may, the contributor to the *Nenagh News* tells us, the devout son of John O'Brien, once he had received the consent and blessing of his good mother, lost no time in preparing for the long and tedious journey across the Atlantic Ocean.

The reader may imagine, but hardly portray, the pangs of sorrow caused by the separation of such a parent and son. The parting from his mother, Father O'Brien was wont often to say in after years, was the greatest sacrifice of his life, and one that he could never forget. How true was her prophecy that God would direct him, how well he merited her blessing, and how faithful he proved to the divine vocation given him, will be revealed in the course of the subsequent chapters.

[12] See note 8.
[13] *Catholic Advocate* as in note 10.

CHAPTER III

EARLY EXPERIENCES IN THE UNITED STATES

A passage across the Atlantic Ocean in a vessel of a hundred years ago was not the jaunt of pastime and pleasure that it has become in the floating palaces of today. It was a positive hardship, often long drawn out and attended with no little danger.

In April, 1826, it was that Matthew O'Brien, then just rounding out his twenty-second year, began his dreary voyage to America. The trip was speedy for the time. At least we are told that it was made in about a month. He landed at Quebec, Canada. Thence he proceeded at once to Savannah, Georgia, to visit an uncle by the name of Meagher and his family, from Toomyvara, County Tipperary.

The religious young man's stay at Savannah was saddened by the fact that mass was said for the Catholics of that city only once in a month. Likely the thought of such spiritual privation strengthened his desire for the priesthood. At any rate, it caused him to make his sojourn in Savannah short. From there he continued his way to New Orleans. In that city lived one Martin Meagher, another uncle.[1]

[1] The *Freeman's Journal,* February 4, 1871; *Nenagh News,* February 1, 1918.—Father G. A. Wilson, the *Journal's* contributor, and Mr. O'Meara, the writer of the article in the *News,* no doubt, received much of their information from Father O'Brien himself. O'Meara does not mention the missionary's visit to New Orleans. But this is one of the most persistent traditions about him in the province; it is expressly noted by Father Wilson.

There is something of a tradition which tells us that the future apostle's object in these travels through so much of the United States was to obtain help in order that he might carry out his design of becoming an anointed of the Lord; and that, though doubtless through no fault of his relations, he failed in this purpose. Like many Europeans, the inexperienced immigrant possibly fancied that money grew on trees in the new American republic. If so, he was soon to discover his error, and to learn that, while it is neither so frequent nor so oppressive, poverty exists in America as well as in Europe. But the young Irishman's character, although he was humble almost to a fault, was too staunch, and the call of God too strong, for him to be daunted by such a failure, disappointing as it must have been to his ardent soul.

At this time the Church of Kentucky, under the guidance of the saintly and apostolic Bishop Flaget, was often the theme of conversation among Catholics throughout the length and breadth of the United States. At Bardstown, that state, were the diocesan college and seminary dedicated to Saint Joseph. Some twenty-five or thirty miles from the little episcopal town, in Marion County, was another college called Saint Mary's. Between these educational institutions, near Springfield, Washington County, stood Saint Thomas's College and Saint Rose's Priory, which belonged to the Order of Saint Dominic.

During his travels and his stay at Savannah and New Orleans, especially in the latter place, Matthew O'Brien learned of these establishments in Kentucky, the need of priests, and the good promise held out for religion

there. In the Diocese of Louisville, if anywhere, he felt, would his heart's desire be realized. To Kentucky, therefore, would he go, offer himself to Bishop Flaget, and trust his cause to divine providence. [2]

Accordingly, our sacerdotal aspirant, having failed to obtain the assistance of which he was in search, now set out on another tedious journey from the old French city of New Orleans. He travelled up the Mississippi River by boat to the Ohio, and then along this latter stream to Louisville. The rest of the way to Bardstown was overland. What with delays, and what with the slow, tedious transportation of that day, it was somewhat more than a year from the time of Matthew's departure from his native land to that of his arrival at Bishop Flaget's residence in central Kentucky.

But before we proceed further with the story of our priestly candidate's early experiences in America, it seems meet that the reader's attention should be called to the hardships entailed in his wanderings through the country prior to his reception at Bardstown. They would have discouraged an ordinary man—nay, turned him from even so holy a design as that which filled Matthew O'Brien's mind.

As with an ocean voyage, so with a journey by land, the travel of nearly a century ago was far different from that of our day and generation. Evans' "Orukter Amphibolos," as he called his first steam-propelled vehicle in America, had not yet developed into the modern railroad with its sleepers and parlor cars. [3] Overland

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Oliver Evans, of Philadelphia, is claimed by some to have been the inventor of the system of high-pressure in steam engines. In 1804, he constructed a steam dredge mounted on a flat boat. The apparatus was

journeys from place to place, therefore, were made by the old-fashioned stage-coach, riding in which was so disagreeable that it usually made the wayfarer regret that he had ever set out on such an arduous undertaking.

The highways were new and, as a rule, unspeakably rough. The inns and taverns, at which the traveller took his meals or lodged for the night, were of a kind with the roads; they offered few, if any comforts; the food was coarse and often poorly prepared. Travel in those days demanded a healthy stomach and a vigorous constitution, with neither of which was the future soul seeker blessed.

Matthew O'Brien's experiences, if we may trust a living tradition that is partially sustained by O'Meara's article in the *Nenagh News,* were even more trying than those usual at that period. The long journeys from Quebec to Savannah, and from Savannah to New Orleans were overland. The stage-coaches were few, and they seldom went in the direction our traveller was going. He had little money. He was therefore obliged to depend on any kind of conveyance to take him from place to place. Often he paid his way by labor. At times he trudged along on foot, depending largely upon the hospitality of those who lived by the wayside. The journey from New Orleans to Louisville, although made by water, was perhaps not less tedious and toilsome.[4]

built in Evans' shop, and in order to transport it to the river, he placed wheels under the boat, and caused the steam engine of the machine to propel it. This was the first steam-propelled vehicle to move in America. Evans called it the "Orukter Amphibolos" (Hill's *Practical Reference Library of General Knowledge,* IV—Article on Railroads; Chicago, 1905).

[4] See note 1. In days not long past, the hardships which Father O'Brien underwent on these journeys were often the topic of conversation, among both priests and lay people.

Through these travels, however, the future missionary learned the sad spiritual condition of Catholics in remote parts of the United States, where there were few or no priests. On the boat from Louisiana to Kentucky, on which tradition tells us he worked to pay for his transportation, he came into contact with laborers from his own country who had not heard mass or received the sacraments for years. These experiences filled Matthew's heart with compassion. They taught him a lesson that was later to stand him in good stead in his life as an ambassador of Christ. By the time he reached Bardstown our wayfarer was tired, weary and worn unto sickness.

About the same time that the pious scion of the O'Briens of Ara left his native Ireland, Bishop Flaget laid the foundation of a brotherhood in Kentucky under the name of the Society of Teaching Brothers. In the mind of the holy prelate, the Right Rev. M. J. Spalding tells us, the life of this society was to be patterned somewhat on that of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Under its care boys sent from all parts should learn the different trades and acquire an ordinary education. Above all, were they to be instructed in their religion, and taught to practise its duties. [5]

Bishop Flaget was watching over this nascent institution with fatherly care and anxiety when Matthew O'Brien reached Bardstown, and asked to be accepted as a student at the diocesan seminary. But the ordinary's mind was then centered on the brothers, from whom he expected great things for the Church of Ken-

[5] Spalding (M. J.), *Sketches of the Early Catholic Missions in Kentucky*, p. 263; and *Sketches of the Life, Times and Character of the Right Rev. Benedict Joseph Flaget*, pp. 294 ff.

tucky. Accordingly, while he received the newcomer with much kindness, he advised him to join the brothers rather than to study for the priesthood. Other reasons for the decision of the prelate were possibly the applicant's age, retiring disposition and delicate health. Besides, Matthew had learned trades at his home in Bawn which would make him a most useful member of the new congregation, whilst his deep piety would be an inspiration for the boys placed under the brothers' care. [6]

In his humility and spirit of obedience our apostle-to-be readily followed the bishop's kindly advice. He felt that the voice of his superior was the voice of God who took this means of showing him that his vocation was to such a religious life, rather than to the priesthood. He now spent a year or more with these good brothers. However, "man proposes, but God disposes." Providence, whose ways are inscrutable, had other designs for this pure soul.

Nor was it the will of heaven that this brotherhood should succeed. Father Derigaud, its spiritual director, died in the fall of 1827, and it dissolved soon afterwards. Although this society was short-lived, it was the first of its kind in the United States. So is it more to the honor of Bishop Flaget to have essayed its establishment and to have failed, than not to have made the attempt at all. Matthew O'Brien's connection with the above effort of the zealous prelate may have changed the whole course of his career.

[6] The *Freeman's Journal*, February 4, 1871, tells us that at the seminary Matthew O'Brien was adjudged too old to study for the priesthood. This could hardly have been the case. Others were accepted in that capacity who were farther advanced in years, and had no better, if even as good, an education.

The anxious Celt's sojourn with these brothers gave him a taste for the religious life, which he found congenial to his temperament. When, therefore, they were disbanded, he turned his thoughts towards Saint Rose's, two miles from Springfield, and about seventeen from Bardstown. Matthew doubtless knew of the Dominicans in Ireland, though perhaps he had been acquainted with none of them. His own county, Tipperary, had been one of their strongholds before their expulsion from the country by the English oppressors.

At Athassel, not far from Cashel, were the ruins of the finest monastery they ever possessed in the island. Not a few of the O'Briens had held high positions in the Order. One, Terence Albert O'Brien, had been successively provincial of the Irish Dominicans and bishop of Emly, County Tipperary, and had won the martyr's crown at Limerick through his intrepid defense of the faith and his country.

In no portion of the world are such things kept longer in memory, or held in deeper veneration, than in Ireland. Nowhere do they exercise a stronger influence for good. More than likely they now had their part in directing the erstwhile Teaching Brother's mind towards the Dominicans of Kentucky.

Saint Rose's, founded in 1806, was the oldest Catholic institution west of the Alleghany Mountains. Saint Thomas' College which was then attached to the convent, had been the first Catholic college erected in that part of the country. The Church of Kentucky was redolent of the apostolic zeal of the fathers in behalf of the faith and Christian education. One of its founders, saintly Father William R. Tuite, still lived at the priory.

Another, the tireless Fenwick, had become not only the apostle of Ohio but likewise the state's first bishop, and yet labored bravely for the Church in the north.[7]

Need we add that all this strongly appealed to the pious soul of Matthew O'Brien, now that he had discovered the religious life so congenial to his character?

Matthew's age and backwardness in his studies, quite naturally, warned him that no time should be lost, if he hoped to realize this new ambition. Accordingly, on the dissolution of the Society of Teaching Brothers, the quondam member of that defunct institute hastened to Saint Rose's. There he made his heart's desire known to the fathers; but, in his humility, he left it to their judgment to decide, in case he was received, whether he should be accepted as a clerical student or as a lay brother. Beneath an untoward external appearance the superior felt that he discovered qualities of splendid promise. This, together with the applicant's unassuming humility and obedient spirit, caused him to be admitted as a candidate for the priesthood.[8]

One would think that this servant of Christ had had his share of trial and disappointment. Yet the ways of providence are not the ways of the world. God chastises those whom He loves, that He may bring them nearer to Himself, and that they may win a brighter crown of glory. Such, we are compelled to believe, were

[7] O'Daniel (V. F.), *The Right Rev. Edward D. Fenwick, O. P.*, *passim*.

[8] There is some uncertainty as to exact date when Matthew O'Brien went to Saint Rose's. Father Wilson (*Freeman's Journal*, February 4, 1871) says that it was in 1828; and Wilson himself was a clerical student there at the time. Both Wilson and Spalding (*Life of Bishop Flaget*, p. 297, note), however, tell us that the future Dominican was still with these brothers when they disbanded; which seems to have been late in 1828 or early in 1829.

heaven's designs in the mischances that befell Father O'Brien in his early life.

The hardships and disappointments through which he had passed from the time he left the shores of Ireland combined with the anxiety of his mind to undermine his constitution. Thus, hardly had he entered upon his studies at Saint Rose's, when his health failed, and the prospects of his becoming a Dominican vanished for the time.[9] In spite of appearances, however, providence had not abandoned this vessel of election. Nay, may we not even say that this additional trial was a further preparation for the work that lay before him, and call it a blessing in disguise?

To soften his new affliction, God opened another refuge for His servant, which gave him an unexpected ray of hope. Rev. William Byrne, a native of Wicklow, Ireland, and an excellent priest, had been ordained in the Cathedral, Bardstown, in the fall of 1819. Two years later, he started Saint Mary's College, in Marion County, some ten miles from Saint Rose's. Father Byrne himself had undergone trials and tribulations not unlike those which we have just described, and was nearly forty years of age at the time of his ordination. He was most intimate with the fathers of Saint Rose's.

Doubtless at the suggestion of these priests, and through their influence, Matthew O'Brien now secured a position as professor at Saint Mary's College. From the outset, he found a friend in saintly Father Byrne, whose kindly advice and assistance he never ceased, in the gratitude of his heart, to cherish until the end of his days.[10] As a student at Saint Rose's, and as a priest

[9] *Freeman's Journal*, February 4, 1871.
[10] *Ibid.*

laboring for the salvation of souls, he could not speak of this benefactor other than in accents of love and affection.

CHAPTER IV

PROFESSOR, STUDENT, RECEPTION OF THE HABIT

With his life as professor at Saint Mary's College began the dawn of better days for the future great missionary. It was in 1828 or 1829 that Rev. William Byrne, president of Saint Mary's, took the sorely tried clerical student under his paternal protection.[1] Almost from the beginning, although one was a priest and the other a layman, quite different in disposition, and of temperaments that ordinarily would not have proved congenial, President Byrne and Professor O'Brien contracted an intimate and tender Christian friendship. Their relations were not unlike those between father and son.

At Saint Mary's Matthew was both professor and student, a situation not unusual in our early educational institutions. While he taught the lower branches to pupils less advanced than himself, he studied the classics under other professors. No doubt, his principal tutor

[1] Father George A. Wilson (*Freeman's Journal,* February 4, 1871), who was a student at Saint Rose's at the time, says expressly that Matthew went to Saint Mary's in 1828. But if he remained with the Teaching Brothers until they disbanded, it seems that 1829 is the correct date of his entrance into that college. See note 8 of Chapter III, p. 26. Father Arthur V. Higgins (*Catholic Advocate,* February 4, 1871) tells us that Father O'Brien was educated "partly at Saint Mary's and partly by the Jesuits at Bardstown." Evidently Father Higgins overlooked the fact that the Jesuits did not take charge of the Bardstown College until 1848, nine years after Father O'Brien's ordination.

in these was Father Byrne himself, who sought to foster his protégé's vocation, and to give him every possible aid. Not a few of our most efficient early American missionaries have been educated in this way. Their credit is all the greater for giving us an example of courage and patience that is not less inspiring than is their zeal.

Thus the days ran smoothly along for the subject of our narrative in this new abode, under the guidance of the founder and president of Saint Mary's, until the second half of 1832. They were happy, peaceful years. His time was taken up with his studies and teaching. No trial seems to have crossed his path. Then his education passed into other and, perhaps, more capable hands.

Some years previous to this time, Bishop Flaget had expressed a wish to have the Society of Jesus represented in his diocese. Accordingly, in June, 1831, three Jesuit Fathers, with Rev. Peter Chazelle as their superior, arrived in Kentucky. They belonged to the province of Lyons, and came to make a survey of the prospects for a college of their institute in that state. At first, negotiations were opened with a view of placing them in charge of Saint Joseph's College and Seminary, Bardstown. But this project failed.

Rev. William Byrne, although he had formerly opposed the Jesuits getting a place in Kentucky at all, now not merely changed his mind; he even offered Father Chazelle and his companions Saint Mary's as a gift to the Society. The generous proffer was gratefully accepted. Thus the college passed into the hands of the Society of Jesus, and in the fall of 1832 the school was

opened under the auspices of this body of noted educators. At the request of Father Chazelle, however, Father Byrne not only remained at Saint Mary's, but likewise accepted the post of president. In this capacity he continued to act until his heroic death, of cholera, in June of the next year. [2]

These changes in the affairs of the college made no change either in the mind or in the ways of Matthew O'Brien. His heart, quite naturally, was saddened beyond expression by the death of his faithful and generous benefactor. Still he sojourned at Saint Mary's for three years more, applying himself with characteristic energy to his work both as student and professor.

There, as it had ever been, the life of the future harvester of souls was a model of virtue. He frequented the sacraments, gave much time to prayer, was prompt and punctual in all his duties. One may imagine the influence for good which such exemplary conduct on the part of a layman of his mature years must have exercised over the boys and younger men in attendance at the college. It has been handed down to us, indeed, that the memory of Matthew O'Brien was long cherished at his alma mater.

The relations between the student professor and the Jesuit Fathers soon became as intimate and confidential as had been those which bound him to his former benefactor, Father Byrne. Matthew sought to hide nothing from his new superiors. His heart and soul were ever open to them, as the lily's blossom to the rays of the

[2] Spalding (M. J.), *Sketches of the Early Catholic Missions of Kentucky*, pp. 270 ff., and *Life of Bishop Flaget*, p. 270: Webb, *Centenary of Catholicity in Kentucky*, p. 286.

sun. It has been said that they compared their elderly, single-minded student to the founder of their institute, Saint Ignatius, who commenced his studies for the priesthood at the age of thirty. [3]

Continuing the kindness of Father Byrne, possibly in part at his request, Father Chazelle and his companions encouraged our priestly aspirant, aided him, fostered his vocation. He repaid them for their goodness and his education by his labors as professor. Towards the end of Matthew's classical course the fathers started him in the study of moral theology, that thus the time for his ordination might be hastened. It is no matter for wonder, therefore, that he ever afterwards fondly cherished the memory of his kindly Jesuit professors. They held a place in his heart and affection, so tradition tells us, next to that occupied by Father William Byrne.

The subject of our sketch had remained but a short time at Saint Rose's as a student, prior to going to Saint Mary's. Yet he had stayed long enough to become strongly attached to the place, and to grow fond of the fathers, whose sincere regard and high esteem he won by the purity of his life, his humility and his spirit of obedience. Their regret that he was obliged to leave was not less painful than his own.

But Father Raphael Muños, the Spanish prior, had closed the secular college, which did not correspond with his idea of Dominican life and vocation. It was felt

[3] It may be well to call the reader's attention to the fact that much of what is said in this chapter, without references, is based on tradition read in the light of articles in the *Freeman's Journal* and the *Catholic Advocate*, both of date February 4, 1871, manuscript notes of Father Hugh F. Lilly for a sermon over Father O'Brien's remains, and notes taken from many talks with old people, both lay and clerical.

ST. ALBERT'S COLLEGE LIBRARY

that Matthew's state of health at the time was too delicate for the rather scanty and coarse food which the poverty of the institution rendered necessary for the boys in the preparatory college of the Order no less than for the community itself. Consequently, it were better for him to go to Saint Mary's, where he might pursue his classical course under more favorable circumstances. Should he regain his strength, and persevere in his intention, then he could return to Saint Rose's and realize his desire of becoming a Friar Preacher.

This was now to happen. Although Matthew O'Brien was happy at Saint Mary's, nay, loved the establishment and those under whose charge it was, he longed for Saint Rose's. He could have found a place among the diocesan clergy. He might perhaps even have joined the religious institute to which his kindly teachers belonged. But the patient Irish professor felt that his vocation was to be a Dominican, among the disciples of the learned Wilson and the apostolic Fenwick, the founders of the American province of Friars Preacher. He was drawn by Saint Dominic's zeal and ardor. The call of Christ was upon this son of Tipperary, urging him to become a Preaching Friar. As with Saint Paul, so with Matthew O'Brien, it was hard for him to "kick against the goad."

Under Father William Byrne's presidency the relations between Saint Mary's College and Saint Rose's Priory had been most friendly and cordial. The same spirit of amity was continued under his Jesuit successors. Visits between the two institutions were among the few occasions of relaxation which their inmates enjoyed in the backwoods of Kentucky. There were then no rail-

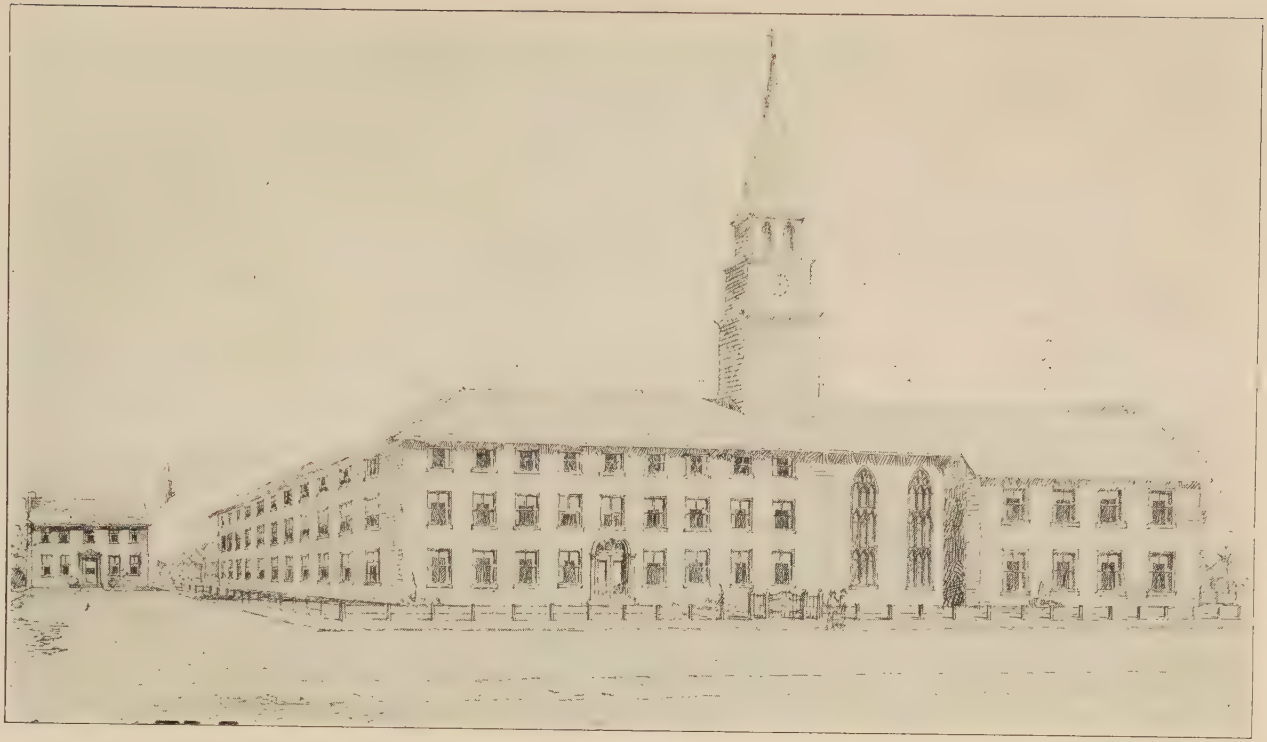
roads in the state. Travel was difficult; good highways almost none; means of diversion few.

Thus these exchanges of friendship were a source of keen mutual pleasure. To hear them recounted in years past would all but make one long for a return of the days and customs of old. In spite of privations which our generation would consider intolerable hardships, there was much peaceful contentment—nay, real happiness. Of simple, innocent, wholesome amusement, which everybody enjoyed, there was enough to take away the ennui of life and to make it worth living.

A delightful spirit of freedom and independence, of self-restraint and self-reliance, then prevailed. People had a natural existence. Life at that time was in strong contrast with the whirlwind of commercial competition which it is largely today—a veritable mad race in which every man strives to outstrip his rivals in the contest. It was calm, restful and salutary. That was an age of patriarchs, heroes, giants; of fortitude, courage, chivalry.

With the changes that have come with time, unfortunately, has been involved the loss of a virtue to which the character of the men and women of the period was largely due, and which was one of the traits that helped to give the subject of our biography the power he wielded for good. We mean that old-time piety that used to be defined: "A natural or filial honor, obedience and affection due to superiors;" or "Dutiful conduct towards one's parents, relatives, country, benefactors or seniors." This virtue, indeed, has grown so obsolete that the use of the word itself, in that sense, has become almost, if not quite, archaic.

Whenever a priest of Saint Mary's visited Saint



SAINT ROSE'S CHURCH AND PRIORY, NEAR SPRINGFIELD, KENTUCKY, IN 1835

Rose's, Professor O'Brien did not fail to send his regards to the fathers there. Nor did he suffer a Dominican to call at the college without finding an opportunity to see him, and to beg him to pray that God's "holy will" might be done.[4] By this, of course, Matthew meant to pray that God would grant him a favorable response, when he should apply to be received as a novice; for his health was anything but robust. In this way, together with occasional letters, the earnest candidate kept in touch with the fathers at Saint Rose's during the six or seven years that he spent at college.[5]

Meanwhile, Father Tuite had died, during the same year and in the same epidemic of which good Father William Byrne became a victim. Shortly before this, Father Richard P. Miles had become prior. Among those at the monastery for whom Matthew O'Brien cherished a special affection was saintly Father Thomas J. Polin, master of novices and of a character not unlike his own. In 1835, therefore, now that his classical course was completed, and he felt that his health was sufficiently strong, Matthew made a formal application, through Father Polin, to be accepted as a clerical novice. The request was granted. Accordingly, before the close of the year we find him again at Saint Rose's, the cradle of the religious life west of the Alleghany Mountains.

In the absence of any record of the event, it is not now

[4] *Freeman's Journal,* February 4, 1871. Father Wilson tells us that one of Professor O'Brien's tricks for having a private talk with Dominican visitors at Saint Mary's was to saddle their horse for them. This was quite characteristic of the man.

[5] Father Wilson tells us that O'Brien was at Saint Mary's seven years. But this depends on whether he went to that institution in 1828, or in 1829. If the latter year be the date of his entrance, he spent only six years there. See note 1 of this Chapter, p. 29, and note 8 of Chapter III, p. 26.

possible to determine the precise date on which Father O'Brien received the Dominican habit. But in view of a former rather iron-clad custom of the province which exacted a six months' postulantship before this august ceremony, we are inclined to believe that he was not given the habit until towards the summer of 1836.[6] By this time, however, it seems quite certain, the future missioner had been clothed with the white frock and black mantle of the Friar Preacher—the white significative of the purity that he should preserve in his soul, the black denoting the spirit of poverty, penance and mortification which he should cultivate.

It is rare that these symbolical meanings of the Order's clerical garb are more literally fulfilled than they were by the subject of this narrative.

In the Order of Saint Dominic, as in most of the other religious institutes, it is the custom for the candidate, when he receives the habit, to add another name to that which had been given him in baptism. By this new name, rather than by the old, should he henceforth be known. The additional patron saint, after whom he is called, is to be his protector in the religious life, and the model whose example he should emulate in his efforts to attain perfection.

[6] Father Wilson simply says that Father Polin "conveyed to him [O'Brien] the joyful tidings of his reception to the Order in 1835." Father Higgins gives 1835 as the year in which he received the habit. The two statements, however, may be reconciled on the supposition that Father Higgins speaks merely of the year in which Father O'Brien went to Saint Rose's and put on the postulant's garb, which was then worn during this period of probation, not of his formal reception to the habit. Such a supposition, besides being quite natural, has the further advantage of bringing the date of Father O'Brien's religious profession nearer to that when he received the habit. He was professed on September 8, 1837; and it does not seem probable that his profession would have been delayed so long, had he received the habit in 1835, however late in the year.

Perhaps as much from his own choice as at the instigation of Father Miles, the prior who gave him the habit, Matthew O'Brien took the name of the wonder-worker of Padua, and became Brother Anthony. In simplicity of character, purity of life and a burning zeal for the salvation of souls there is much in his life that reminds one not a little of Saint Anthony of Padua and his confrére in religion, Saint Joseph of Cupertino.

We can more readily imagine than portray the happiness of Saint Rose's new recruit, now that so much of his long-cherished dream was realized. He rejoiced in the thought that God, who had guided him so far along the way, would continue His protection, and complete that which He had begun. Matthew O'Brien was at last a Dominican novice; his name Brother Anthony. The remainder of his life-story will be that of a religious.

CHAPTER V

IN THE NOVITIATE

The religious life in every order begins with the reception of its distinctive garb. This ceremony is the gateway that leads to the novitiate, than which nothing is held more sacred by any religious institute. In the biography of a member of an order these things mean much, for they are sources from which the subject draws no little inspiration. In the life of a priest of Father O'Brien's character they have a vital importance. Nay, they are necessary as a suitable background to give the story proper tone and color.

Before proceeding with the narrative of Brother Anthony's early life as a Friar Preacher, therefore, a brief word on the ceremonies of investiture in the Dominican habit will not be out of place. They are simple, but impressive and laden with symbolical meaning. So are they venerable—consecrated by the long use of ages. An outline of the purpose and process of the novitiate will afford an idea of one's religious formation. In the present instance it will lay before the reader a picture of an apostle and great missionary in the making.

For the reception of the habit the candidate enters the choir, or the church, in his secular dress, and kneels before the superior, who is seated in front of the altar. At a given signal, the prospective novice prostrates

himself, his arms outstretched in the form of a cross. The prior then asks him, in Latin of course: "What seek you?" To which the postulant responds: "God's mercy and yours." All this signifies an oblation of self on the altar of divine love, and a spirit of readiness to obey the voice of superiors as the voice of God.

At another signal, the recumbent form arises. Then he kneels again, while the superior, who in the present instance was the Rev. Richard P. Miles, briefly explains the nature of this sacrifice of self, together with the life and obligations which the novice will assume, should he persevere.[1] At the close of the discourse, the aspirant to the Order is asked, in Latin again: "Do you wish, by the grace of God, to undertake all this?" The unfailing response is: "I do." Now the superior says: "May God complete that which He has begun." The candidate replies: "Amen."

The supplicant now kneels nearer the prior, who, with the assistance of the master of novices, clothes him with the white tunic, scapular and capuche. Over these is placed the flowing black mantle, which rounds out the distinctive garb of the Order of Preachers. With its meaning the reader has become acquainted. Nor should we forget that the change of apparel itself typifies a complete change of life, a laying aside of the world for the kingdom of Christ. Meanwhile, the community sings: "Come, O Holy Ghost" (the *Veni Creator*), that God may bestow the gift of perseverance upon the new member.

[1] Tradition has it that Father Miles was a very touching and effective preacher on such occasions. His language was simple and clear; his instructions direct to the point, and full of practical common sense.

When the clothing with the habit is finished, the novice prostrates himself for the second time, while the liturgical prayers are said to invoke the blessing of heaven upon him. He then rises, and is blessed with holy water. Now the strains of the *Te Deum,* one of our most beautiful canticles of praise and joy, fill the sacred edifice. In the meantime, the new novice passes back and forth to receive the kiss of peace from each member of the community. This is a symbol of the brotherhood which he has just contracted with the consecrated servants of God; yea, of the fraternal charity which should unite them in love of the Divine Master. [2]

Although plain and simple, this ceremony of investiture in the habit is one of the most impressive and touching that anybody could wish to witness. On a soul like that of Brother Anthony O'Brien, we fancy, it must have exercised an influence that was both strong and lasting, when he himself was ushered through it into his noviceship.

The novitiate in a religious institute, as the reader doubtless knows, is a period of trial and probation wherein the new recruit's vocation is thoroughly tested. It is to an order what a military or naval academy is to a country's army or navy, a school in which candidates are tried and proved that those in authority may ascertain whether they have an aptitude for the life to which they aspire. An order without a novitiate for its aspirants would be as helpless as a modern nation without a training school for its officers.

The novitiate lasts from one to two years, according to the rules of the various religious orders. During this

[2] All this is according to formula; so it is held sacred in the Order.

time, not only must the superiors scrutinize the novice; the candidate must also study himself. He should weigh well and thoughtfully his object in leaving the world, the motives that impelled him to enter religion, the responsibilities which, in case he perseveres, he will take upon himself.

Whilst the religious life does not oblige one to be actually perfect, it requires that one should ever strive after perfection. It is in this sense that it is called a life of perfection. It is no sin for a religious not to be perfect; but it is sinful for him not to aim at perfection. His very consecration to God demands this, for by his vows he takes Christ as his portion, pledges himself to follow the evangelical counsels. Unlike the faithful in general, he can no longer rest content with merely an observance of the commandments.

Brother Anthony O'Brien aspired to a life of real perfection. That he might the more surely attain this object of his heart's desire, he longed to bind himself to God by the vows of religion; for these would oblige him to observe even the counsels of Christ—place him on the highway to salvation.

During his probationary period, a novice must seriously consider this obligation, and ask himself if he is determined to bear the burdens which it imposes. So also should he learn the rule and constitutions, the spirit, the work, the end and purpose of the religious institute membership in which is the object of his holy ambition. Furthermore, he should remember that, if he would become perfect, a religious must align himself, so to express it, with the genius of his own institute. History shows that the members of any order who have become

saints or blessed were precisely those who thus imbued themselves with its character and ideals.

The novitiate is, moreover, a time of spiritual formation in which the candidate is trained for the life of the order which he has embraced, and drilled in the practices peculiar to it. Indeed, one's entire career as a religious depends largely upon this early spiritual apprenticeship. If it is performed well and conscientiously, the religious state ordinarily not only becomes a source of happiness and blessings, but even proves a yoke that is light and sweet. If, on the contrary, it is passed in a careless and indifferent manner, such a life can hardly fail to be irksome, as well as productive of little or no spiritual advantage.

As a rule, the orders have flourished, or decayed, according to the spirit which they instilled into their prospective members during this crucial time.

Thus the importance of this period of probation will readily be seen. All the orders rightly regard such a test as of supreme necessity. It is a realization of these facts that has caused our religious institutes, even the Church herself, to surround the novitiate with every safeguard, and to oblige all, clerics and lay brothers alike, to go through its training. That its work may be the more thorough and effective a special part of the convent is set apart for the novices. Only superiors are supposed to deal with them, or to enter that portion of the house which is allotted to them.

Here the new members are placed under the care of a master of novices, who is selected as their immediate superior partly because of his own deep spiritual sense, and partly because of gifts that adapt him for so

responsible a position. It is the father master's duty to train and form the candidates of the order according to its rule, spirit and constitution, or even according to the laudable customs of the province to which they belong.

From the reception of the habit to the taking of the vows of religion, the novices' home is in their isolated section of the conventual cloister. Here they form a little world to themselves under the government of their master. Their souls live here in an atmosphere of piety, are steeped day by day in that spiritual and supernatural life after which they must strive, and which henceforth should be the inspiration of their every thought and action. Cut off from all distracting cares by monastic walls, the neophytes' constant effort, if they hope to live the ideal life of the order, must be gradually to shape themselves, so to express it, on its pattern by means of the regulations of their institute, convent and master of novices.

All these things are so many aids to perfection for the soul thus freed from the world, its perplexities and its influences. In the Order of Saint Dominic they are, furthermore, a preparation for a vigorous apostolic life after ordination to the priesthood. The very *raison d'être* of this religious institute is salvation of souls and the good of the Church.

The novitiate of the Friars Preacher, unless somewhat lengthened by the superiors in special cases, covers a twelvemonth.[3] During this time the master of novices must also drill his charges in prayer and meditation;

[3] The novitiate cannot be protracted, by provincial authority, for more than six months beyond the prescribed year.

instill into them a spirit of penance and recollection; teach them the choral office which is sung or chanted by the community in common. Above all, has he to ground them well in the vows of obedience, poverty and chastity, for these are the very corner-stones upon which the religious life rests. Private devotions, examens and other spiritual exercises round out their preparatory training.

Saint Dominic believed that the health of the body contributes much to the health of the soul. Accordingly, a reasonable amount of recreation and physical exercise is allowed, or even prescribed. But silence, so necessary for prayer, study and recollection, is the general rule. It is medicine for the soul no less than a source of vigor and strength to the spiritual athlete in training for the combats of the Church, which he is to defend as well as himself against the attacks of the powers of evil. In silence and solitude the aspirant to the priesthood must seek to ingrain the virtues and practices taught him by his master of novices until they become deeply rooted habits.

Brother Matthew O'Brien was blessed with a novice master who was singularly adapted to that position, the Rev. Thomas James Polin. Nor was this all. Father Polin was a man of exceptional holiness of life. With scrupulous care did he watch over the spiritual formation of those entrusted to his charge. None who passed through his hands failed to receive a thorough religious training, even in its minutest details.

Neither infraction of rule nor manifestation of a worldly spirit, however slight, was suffered to go unnoticed. If tradition may be trusted, Father Polin

was perhaps almost too rigid in his discipline, and too free with his penances. Withal, he was amiable; he tempered his strictness with much paternal sympathy, kindness and affection. It was further softened by the realization that he himself did far more than he asked of others. In fact, it is said that he often took on himself the penalties which he felt were due his novices for their little faults.

Not only was Father Polin a living example of the religious life; nor did he merely lead the way in whatever he taught; he likewise practised the spirit of penance and mortification to a heroic degree. He was deeply ascetic and mystic. The influence of such a master could but facilitate the growth of his novices in the spiritual life, or even in holiness. They did not simply admire and esteem him for his virtues; they likewise loved him profoundly for his keen interest in their souls. He led the way. They followed, for this master of novices was universally regarded as a saint. To him and Brother Anthony we may apply the old adage: "Like father, like son." Faithfully did this Irish novice respond to the efforts of his ascetic father master. [4]

Brother Anthony O'Brien had inherited the spirit of prayer, piety and docility from his Christian mother. His early training at home, as well as his severe experiences in the world, had been a preparation for this new life. These latter had taught him to bend his will to

[4] Father Polin was held in the highest esteem by Bishop Flaget. By the people, because of his asceticism, he was regarded as a saint. His funeral was one of the most numerously attended ever held at Saint Rose's. His death is said to have been hastened by excessive penance and mortification. A beautiful and touching appreciation of him is given in the *Catholic Advocate,* Bardstown, Kentucky, for January 12, 1839.

that of another. Indeed, they kept his mind and heart as plastic as those of a child.

In this way, despite his age, the religious formation of the former professor was an easy matter both for himself and for his father master. This was the task to which Anthony now applied himself with all his energy from the day on which he was clothed in the white and black garb of the Preaching Friars.

For the reasons given, the elderly novice was spared the difficulty with which men of mature years so often have to contend in changing their old ways and contracting new habits. From the outset, he was a model religious, exact in the observance of every rule, submissive to his superiors, devout and prayerful, keenly anxious to advance in the way of perfection. In all this Brother Anthony followed the generous impulse of his own heart; yet it was quickened by the inspiring example of Father Polin.

Religious novitiates in general are marked by a severe simplicity. They are ordinarily located in some quiet, secluded spot, so that the young men in training may be the more effectually shut out from worldly distractions. Those of the Order of Saint Dominic form no exception to this rule. Saint Rose's is remotely situated; in truth, it is somewhat inaccessible. Yet, with its hallowed memories of the first struggles of the province, its salubrious climate, its rural solitude, the beautiful rolling country far as eye can see, it was an ideal place for a novitiate. [5]

There early to bed and early to rise was the rule. A

[5] Saint Rose's is now (1922) occupied by the students of the province who are in the first year of philosophy.

spirit of prayer, self-denial and sacrifice pervaded the institution. No luxury was allowed candidates for the Order. Each novice, if possible, had a room to himself. This is required by the constitutions. Diminutive though it was; its furnishings the simplest—a small bed with a straw mattress, a little table and wash-stand, one or two chairs, all most likely of domestic manufacture. The only ornaments in his cell were a crucifix, a statue of the Blessed Virgin, and perhaps a few holy pictures. The poverty of the day made the simplicity of the priory all the more severe. So did it at times render life harder than otherwise it might have been.

It demanded a brave heart and a strong will to persevere in those early years of the Dominican Province of Saint Joseph. But Brother Matthew O'Brien courageously bore all, whether hardships or only privation. Nay, he was joyous with a spiritual joy, happy at the thought that he was at last on the way to the attainment of the object of his holy ambition, and that he would soon be united to God by the double bond of the religious life and the priesthood.

However, it would seem that providence had still another ordeal in store for the earnest man. There is a tradition, at least, which tells us that towards the end of his novitiate his health again became much impaired, and that, in consequence, his profession was delayed for several months. Brother Anthony, the same tradition assures us, endured this last test of his vocation with the same patience, resignation and trust in the will of God that he had shown under previous trials. He prayed the more, confident that, with the grace of heaven, all would be well in the end. So it happened.

But to tell of this will be the burden of the next chapter. Suffice it here to state that, during his year of probation, the faithful son of Saint Dominic laid well and strong the spiritual foundations on which he continued to build for the rest of his life.

CHAPTER VI

PROFESSION, STUDIES AND ORDINATION

From youth Brother Anthony O'Brien had been a constant reader of the Bible. For years the New Testament had been his inseparable companion. Through his many trials he found much strength in poring over its pages. The promise of Saint Paul that God will not suffer one to be tried beyond that which one is able to bear, and that, however great the temptation, it is accompanied with the grace necessary to withstand it, was as a ray of hope and comfort which sustained our candidate for the priesthood while in the novitiate. [1]

Another source of consolation for the pious novice were the words of Saint James who tells us: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he hath been proved, he shall receive the crown of life, which God hath promised to them that love Him." [2]

In many things, indeed, had Brother Anthony been afflicted. God had tried him as gold in the furnace, and found him worthy of Himself. Now, therefore, was he to be generously rewarded. But here we must lay before the reader changes in the Church's legislation in regard to the profession and vows of religious men that have been made since the days of Father O'Brien's novitiate.

[1] I Corinthians, X, 13.
[2] James I, 12.

According to the old canon law, a novice, when his novitiate or period of probation was ended, took the three vows of obedience, poverty and chastity. This act was called his profession. If he belonged to a religious order, he made solemn vows. If he were a member of a religious congregation, he took simple vows.

By many the solemn vow was considered irrevocable, even indispensable by the supreme head of the Church. Those who took it gave up all right and title to personal possessions. The simple vow, while perpetual, could be dispensed with.[3] This, in fact, often occurred. It made the use and spending of money, etc., unlawful without permission, but it did not destroy all radical right to property.

This law obtained until the reign of Pius IX. March 19, 1857, Pius issued an encyclical letter by which he required that candidates of religious orders should, at first, pronounce only simple perpetual vows. Three years later they should be admitted to solemn vows.[4] Their first vows were called the simple profession; the second were known as the solemn profession.

The rule instituted by the Ninth Pius held until the *New Code of Canon Law* of Pius X became operative. This was in 1918, under the late Pontiff, Benedict XV. According to this latest legislation all religious, whether they belong to an order or to a congregation, must first take merely temporary vows for three years. On the expiration of this time they may either return to

[3] There were a few congregations that took their vows from year to year; but these were an exception to the general rule.

[4] The Society of Jesus was excepted from the legislation of Pius IX, for its members did not take the solemn vows until some years after their simple profession.

the world or pronounce the solemn or the perpetual simple vows, in accordance with the requirements of the institute of which they are members. In case they persevere, their duties and obligations remain the same as were ever those of the religious life.

In this connection, it may be noted that in former days there were many opinions in regard to the dissolubility of the solemn vows, and their difference from the simple vows. But under the present canon law all agree that the distinction comes from the determination of the Church. It is worthy of notice, however, that it still remains much more difficult to obtain a dispensation from the solemn vows of the orders than from the less stringent obligations of the religious institutes.

Solemn vows and common life make the religious order; simple vows and common life make the religious institute or congregation. The Dominicans are an order. Prior to the change made by Pius IX, in 1857, they took only solemn vows.

Brother Anthony O'Brien's novitiate was made under the old law. Thus with one stroke was he to sever his connections with the world, and to bind himself irrevocably to the service of God in the religious life, for at that day a dispensation from the solemn vows was indeed rare and difficult. But this was precisely what our valiant soldier of Christ desired. He longed to join himself to the blessed Master with chains that could not easily be broken. For the joyful event, therefore, he prepared with all the characteristic ardor of his soul.

We may rest assured that the ten days of retreat prescribed by the Order's constitutions before so com-

plete a giving of oneself to God were spent by our pious novice in an earnest search into his past life, no less than in forming strong resolutions for the future. Meanwhile Father Miles, who gave him the habit, had been elected provincial. Accordingly, on September 8, 1837, Brother Anthony again knelt before this revered priest to take his vows of religion. His hands placed between those of his superior and supporting the book of constitutions, he read aloud the words that made him a member of the venerable Order of Saint Dominic.

Nothing could be simpler, nor at the same time more solemn and sublime in its simplicity, than the time-honored ceremony of religious profession in the Order of Preachers. The absence of all external splendor sets in clearer light the supernal beauty and the profound significance of the act by which the novice is consecrated to religion. He gives himself wholly and unreservedly to God; and this he does in a few plain, pointed words. Those who are in the least spiritual-minded cannot fail to be stirred to the very depths of their souls on witnessing such a scene. [5]

The formula of profession contains but two sentences; yet in these the novice promises obedience until death to God, to the Blessed Virgin, to Saint Dominic and to the General of the Order and his successors. If the Master General Himself does not receive the vows, which he can rarely do, except in the Eternal City, the promise of obedience is made to the local or immediate superior who acts in his place. The constitutions of the Order, together with the rule of Saint Augustine, are

[5] Not unfrequently have persons, after witnessing the profession of a Dominican novice, remarked to the writer that they had never seen anything quite so solemn and impressive.

designated as the norm of the obedience to be rendered and of the life to be followed. As has been stated in a previous work:

> The new member promises obedience first of all to God, to show that he obeys Him rather than man. He pledges obedience to the Blessed Virgin, whereby he is reminded that the Queen of Heaven is the patroness and protectrix of the Order, to whom all its members owe a special filial devotion. While the name of the visible head of the Church is not mentioned, everyone knows that the Order and its brethren are subject to the Sovereign Pontiff in all things.
>
> The name of Saint Dominic is included that each newly professed member may the more readily realize that the founder of the Order, next to the Divine Master, is the ideal after which he should strive to model his life as a religious.
>
> Finally, the reason for making the profession to the local superior, not in his own name, but as acting in the place of the Master General, is to signify where the supreme authority and the principle of unity in the Order lie. But . . .. this by no means frees the subject from the strictest obligation of full and complete obedience to any and every superior under whom he may be placed.
>
> Obedience, indeed, is regarded as the very essence of the Order's life. It is, in fact, expressly to emphasize this important truth that it is the only one of the three religious vows mentioned in the formula of profession—those of poverty and chastity being contained in that of obedience as beauty and sweetness in the rose, or as purity and sanctity in the soul. [6]

[6] O'Daniel (V. F.), *Very Rev. Charles H. McKenna, O. P.*, pp. 48-49. The document of Brother Anthony's religious profession, the earliest that we have been able to find in his own handwriting, is still preserved in the archives of Saint Rose's Priory, near Springfield, Kentucky. Translated into English, it reads:

"Jesus, Mary, Dominic.

"I, Brother Anthony O'Brien, born in lawful wedlock and thirty-three years of age, declare that I have entered the Order of Friars Preacher subject to no force, under no compulsion, and through no fear; but, as I confidently trust, moved by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. I likewise

Upon one of Brother Anthony O'Brien's deeply spiritual character such a ceremony could not but make a profound and lasting impression. Long and well had he pondered over its meaning. Thoroughly did he realize his obligation to strive after perfection. With his whole heart and soul he gave himself to God, and resolved to follow the evangelical counsels taught by Christ.

Wrapt in the thought of the things of heaven, the new Dominican was ready to start at a moment's notice for the remotest corner of the earth in obedience to the voice of authority. A beautiful disposition of soul this which he retained throughout his religious life, with the result that day by day he soared nearer and nearer to the heights of sanctity.

The novitiate proper, now known as the simple or strict novitiate, is followed by what is called in the Order of Preachers the novitiate of professed clerics. This is a further period of spiritual formation for candidates to the priesthood. It lasts until their ordination. But it is not so rigid as the earlier course of religious training.

declare that I wish to remain in the same Order and to make my profession. In testimony whereof I sign this with my own hand.

"Brother Anthony O'Brien.

"Done in the Convent of Saint Rose, of the Anglo-American Friars Preacher, this eighth day of September, 1837."

Then follows the formula of profession:

"I, Brother Anthony O'Brien, a native of Ireland, make my profession and promise obedience to God, to the Blessed Virgin Mary, to the Blessed Dominic, our Father, and to you, Very Rev. Father Pius Miles, Provincial of Saint Joseph's Province and taking the place of the most Rev. Thomas Hyacinth Cipoletti, Master General of the Holy Order of Preachers and his successors, according to the Rule of Saint Augustine and the Constitutions of the Friars' Preacher. To you and to your successors I promise that I will be obedient until death.

"Brother Anthony O'Brien.

"September 8, A. D., 1837."

Even those who are priests before they enter the Order must spend four years in the novitiate of professed clerics under the care and training of their novice master, unless dispensed by the General for some urgent reason. Professed students are not supposed to have the same spiritual master over them as the simple novices. Nay, they should live in a different convent or priory specially designated for a house of studies.

Yet in the early days of few fathers, few clerical students, few novices, great poverty and much work to be done, economy of every character had to be practised. For this reason, the novices, whether professed or not, then had the same father master as well as lived under the same roof.

Such was the case in Brother Anthony O'Brien's day. In this way, he enjoyed the advantages of the spiritual instructions and the good example of the saintly Thomas J. Polin for more than a year after his profession. On Christmas Day, 1838, however, the gloom of sorrow was cast over the pious student's heart by the death of his beloved friend and master of novices. Father Polin's place seems to have been taken by Father Charles Dominic Bowling, a man of stern character, strong will and rigid discipline, but endowed with a tender heart. Under him the subject of our sketch rounded out his period of probation.

As a rule, in the Order of Saint Dominic candidates for the priesthood begin their course of philosophy immediately after their religious profession. This study is succeeded by that of theology. Brother Anthony O'Brien, as the reader will doubtless remember, had begun his divinities while at Saint Mary's College. There also he had likely studied some philosophy.

At Saint Rose's, owing to his age and health, he seems to have been given but little of this latter science, which is called the handmaid of theology. Nor, if we may depend on tradition, did he have much love for the abstractions of philosophy. For the same reason, a dispensation was granted which permitted him to pursue his course of studies during the postulancy and noviceship. This was not uncommon at that time. It considerably advanced our anxious novice's ordination.

Brother Anthony's greatest handicap in his studies, tradition tells us again, was an extreme diffidence and a wretched memory. As a counterbalance to this difficulty, however, nature had given him a penetrating mind. Accordingly, for he applied himself to his work with the energy and perseverance characteristic of his entire life, our Irish student made no mean progress in theology. Although, owing to his age, he could not hope to master the subject, he laid solid the foundations of a practical science which he was afterwards to use with extraordinary effect in the apostolic ministry, especially in the sacred tribunal of the confessional.

In the meantime, Father Richard P. Miles, the Dominican provincial, had been appointed to the new See of Nashville, Tennessee. This lovable ecclesiastic had always held Brother Anthony in the highest esteem, for beneath an undue humility and self-distrust he detected parts which, if brought out, would be the making of a no ordinary man. As prior and provincial he had taken the Gaelic candidate into the Order, clothed him with its habit, and accepted his vows of religion. Now he was to give him all the sacred orders.

Father Miles, obliged by Rome to accept the miter,

received episcopal consecration as the first ordinary of Nashville in the cathedral of Bardstown, Kentucky, on Sunday, September 16, 1838. Because Bishop Flaget was in Europe, the venerable Bishop David was asked to perform the ceremony, but his health obliged him to decline the request. Thus Bishop Rosati of Saint Louis became the consecrator. With him were associated in the capacity of assistants Right Revs. Simon Gabriel Bruté and Guy Ignatius Chabrat, respectively the ordinary of Vincennes, Indiana, and the coadjutor of Bardstown. Enfeebled Bishop David, however, occupied a chair in the sanctuary. Rev. John Timon, later the first to fill the episcopal See of Buffalo, preached the sermon for the occasion.[7]

Whilst preparations were under way for taking possession of the new southern diocese, Bishop Miles stayed with the fathers at Saint Rose's. Accordingly, Brother Anthony O'Brien was hurriedly made ready that he might receive still further favors from his former superior. On Thursday, October 4, therefore, Bishop Miles gave him the tonsure and the four minor orders

[7] Bishop David, Bardstown, Kentucky, to Sister Elizabeth, Morganfield, Kentucky, September 17, 1838 (Archives of Nazareth Academy); *Catholic Advocate,* Bardstown, Kentucky, August 25, and September 22, 1838; a letter of a non-Catholic, who was present at the consecration, published in *The Record,* Louisville (date of *The Record* missing).

There was a notable assemblage at Bishop Miles' consecration. Besides the members of the hierarchy mentioned, were present: the venerable Father Stephen T. Badin, apostle of Kentucky, who was assistant priest; Rev. Elisha J. Durbin, another venerable Kentucky missionary, who was deacon; Rev. Anthony Blanc, later the first archbishop of New Orleans, who was subdeacon; and Rev. Martin J. Spalding, D.D., later the third bishop of Louisville and the seventh archbishop of Baltimore, who was the notary and read the bulls of appointment. Father F. X. Evremond, S. J. (a friend of Brother Anthony O'Brien) and Rev. William E. Clark were masters of ceremonies, whilst Revs. Stephen Montgomery, O. P., and Joseph Hazeltine acted as chaplains to the bishop elect. Many clergy were present, and the cathedral was filled to overflowing by the faithful.

in the Church of Saint Rose. These were followed by subdeaconship and deaconship on the next two days. At that period of great missionary needs, dispensations from the canonical interstices between the various sacred orders were so common as to be a matter of course.

It was but meet that the first orders given by good Doctor Miles should be conferred upon one for whom he had done so much, and whom he loved so well. [8]

It is probable that the bishop promised at this time, perhaps at Anthony's own request, to return to Saint Rose's and raise the future harvester of souls to the priesthood, when he should be prepared for that exalted dignity. We have been able to find no record of this supreme event in the noted missioner's life. But a living and unbroken tradition in the province that Father O'Brien was ordained by Bishop Miles, coupled with statements to the same effect by the two obituary accounts of him, should leave no doubt about the fact. [9]

The new priest's first baptismal record at Saint Rose's, dated September 1, 1839, shows that he had been ordained by that time. An article in the *Catholic Advocate* of Bardstown, July 6, 1839, reveals the presence of Bishop Miles among his former brethren in

[8] The *Catholic Advocate,* Bardstown, October 20, 1838. Bishop Chabrat administered confirmation at Saint Rose's on Sunday, October 7. The *Advocate* does not say whether he or Bishop Miles gave these orders to Brother Anthony O'Brien; but a living tradition of the province tells us that it was Miles. This, together with the fact that he was a Dominican, had been Brother Anthony's superior, had received him into the Order, given him the habit, and presided at his religious profession, should make it quite certain that the newly consecrated prelate's services were enlisted to ordain his friend. It is also worthy of note that Brother Anthony received the minor orders during a week's "spiritual retreat," or parochial mission, given the parish by Rev. Robert A. Abell, which aroused great fervor in the people.

[9] The *Catholic Advocate* (Louisville) and the *Freeman's Journal,* both of date February 4, 1871.

Kentucky during the latter part of the previous month. Consequently we infer that the future apostle was likely ordained by him on this occasion. [10]

Thus Father O'Brien, as we shall have to call him henceforth, finally became an ambassador of Christ about the middle of 1839. Long and ardently had he sighed to be one of the Lord's anointed laboring for the salvation of souls. He was then thirty-five years of age, a period of life when most priests have already accomplished much of their best work. However, the zealous Friar Preacher soon took up his sacred task with such ardor that he more than made up for the time he had lost through successive disappointments. Trials they were that would have discouraged a less militant soldier of Christ.

[10] The same issue of the Bardstown *Catholic Advocate* tells of the ordination of Brother Peter Anderson as subdeacon at Saint Rose's, on Sunday, June 23, 1839. Although his name is not mentioned, the facts we have just given, the wording of the account and the interesting ceremonies incline one to the belief that Father O'Brien received the priesthood on this occasion, and that his part in them was omitted through some oversight. The *Catholic Advocate* of Louisville (as in preceding note) says that he was ordained in 1839. The *Freeman's Journal* (as in preceding note) says in 1840. The *Journal* is evidently wrong. During its first years the *Advocate* was published at Bardstown, but was afterwards transferred to Louisville.

CHAPTER VII

FIRST YEARS IN THE PRIESTHOOD

Whatever Father O'Brien did he did to the best of his ability. Like every good priest, he considered ordination the most important step in his life. Impelled by the stimulus of a spotless soul, he put his whole being into the retreat that preceded the reception of the holy order that was to make him an ambassador of Christ, and to constitute him a master laborer in the Lord's vineyard.

Years of waiting and of hoping almost against hope rendered the new clergyman the more anxious that he should receive worthily the sacrament of priesthood, and made the more ardent his desire that he should begin his belated work well. But he had not yet completed his course of theology; nor had he spent in the professed novitiate the four years required by the constitutions of the Order. Accordingly, although he was now ordained, Father O'Brien was still kept at his studies. Another twelvemonth or more he remained under the direction of the novice master. A state of patient expectancy we may call this time, which served as a complement to his spiritual formation.

This period, however, was a good preparation for the work that God had in store for the earnest Dominican. It enabled him to better himself in the knowledge

of theology, so necessary for the guidance of the faithful. The Holy Scriptures he read so assiduously that, in spite of his poor memory, he finally became able to quote them with astonishing facility.

During this interval, furthermore, because of his piety and religious spirit, Father O'Brien was appointed to the office of submaster of novices, that the young aspirants of the Order might have the advantage of direction by so exemplary a character. Along with this position and his studies he had charge of the catechetical instruction of the children of the parish on Sundays. Occasional sermons and visits to the sick, poor and uninstructed, especially among those of the colored race, filled up the rest of the zealous priest's spare moments.[1] But these labors did not prevent him from being a model of religious observance.

As time wore along, perhaps by the fall of 1840, a dispensation was given Father O'Brien, by which he was excused from spending in the novitiate of professed clerics the full four years demanded by the Order's law. He was then appointed master of novices. Our Friar Preacher possessed many qualities that eminently fitted him for such a post of honor and responsibility. As a matter of fact, the success with which he filled this position is still gratefully spoken of in the province.

Taking his own trainer in the religious life, Father Thomas J. Polin, as his exemplar and guide in the formation of the young candidates for the institute, the new novice master left nothing undone that he might mold them in accordance with the rule of the Order and the spirit of its founder, Saint Dominic.

[1] The *Freeman's Journal*, February 4, 1871.

Father O'Brien, however, while perhaps not so talented as was Father Polin, possessed a more judicial temperament. Longanimity personified, the future missionary rarely, if ever, lost his patience, or even permitted his feelings to become ruffled. Though austere in the extreme with himself, his tender heart would not suffer him to use severity with others. All this caused him to be no less deeply loved than profoundly revered by the young men under his care. It was the same with the fathers, among whom he now lived on terms of equality.

The new master of novices was much given to reading, a pastime of which he seemed never to tire. Quite naturally, because of his pious character, ascetic literature, works on religion, church history and lives of the saints, especially those of his own Order, were his favorite volumes. This same love of books he sought to instill into his youthful charges, not only that they might thus improve their minds and obtain spiritual food for their souls, but as well learn a pleasant way in which to spend their spare moments. No habit, he felt, would stand them in better stead in their future ministry. It is a fact worthy of record that the priests who were under Father O'Brien as novices became noted as diligent readers. No less did they imbibe his zeal and kindly temperament.[2]

Yet Father O'Brien was a man of splendid common

[2] There is no extant record of Father O'Brien having been master of novices at Saint Rose's. But tradition leaves no doubt about the fact. Father Sidney A. Clarkson, one of the most perfect and kindly gentlemen one could wish to meet, often spoke to the writer of the time which he himself spent as a novice under Father O'Brien. In fact, what we state of this period of Father O'Brien's life is, in large part, taken from talks with Father Clarkson.

sense rather than a man of scholarly attainments. He seemed to understand human nature almost as he understood a book, and instinctively to do the right thing at the right time and in the right way. These, no doubt, were the qualities which Bishop Miles and Father Polin specially detected in Brother Anthony as postulant, novice and student, causing them not merely to admire him, but likewise to expect great things from him. The same qualities adapted our Preaching Friar all the more for the delicate position which he now held.

Together with the office of novice master, for in those days of smaller numbers its duties were not so burdensome, he continued the apostolic labors to which reference has been made. Besides, at that time, such work, with but few to do it, made it necessary for every one to turn his hand at many things.

Nor was this all. It fell to our novice master's lot to hear many confessions in the parochial church. Indeed, he soon acquired the reputation of being an extraordinary spiritual director. Such a repute, as is always the case, brought crowds of pious people not only from Saint Rose's Congregation, but from the surrounding parishes as well, to consult him on affairs of their souls. Nor were hardened sinners slow to discover that Father O'Brien, although still young in the priesthood, was skilled in the science of reconciling the erring with God. They, too, came in numbers, and from all distances. [3]

[3] In the boyhood days (and even early priesthood) of the writer the old parishioners of Saint Rose's used frequently to speak of what a fine confessor Father O'Brien was from the time of his ordination. The people were afraid to let him see them do anything out of the way; but very many sought him out, when they wanted to go to confession.

Thus the budding apostle's past experiences with the world had already begun to be of advantage to him in the exercise of the sacred ministry. They were particularly helpful in his dealings with men, towards whom he was drawn by a special sympathy. He felt that, while of greater physical strength, men were spiritually weaker than women, as well as exposed to more and greater dangers. In the guidance of souls Father O'Brien took Father Polin as his exemplar, just as he had made him his model in training the novices and in directing his own religious life.

But here we must briefly interrupt the thread of our story in order to lay before the reader the forces that were at work, at this early period of his priestly life, in shaping the future of the tireless worker in God's garden. Every man who attains success is largely the product of the environment into which he is thrown. The biography, therefore, that passes over such influences is not only incomplete, but also lacks that coloring which imparts interest to a narrative, as well as makes it the more intelligible.

The Order of Saint Dominic, it will be remembered, is both active and contemplative. Yet it is rather active than contemplative. The holy patriarch would have his religious institute pre-eminently apostolic. Its end is essentially the salvation of souls. This is declared, more than once, in the Order's constitutions.

The means for the attainment of this end are teaching and preaching the truths of eternal life to the people. This is also stated in the constitutions. In fact, it is precisely the reason for the name of "Friars Preacher," or "Order of Preachers," which was given it by Innocent

III, and is still retained as its official designation after the lapse of more than seven centuries.

Zealous Innocent, warned in vision, anticipated great things for the new institute. Nor was he mistaken in his expectations, although he did not live to see them realized. The Order has made good the title given it by the noble Pontiff. During the seven hundred years of its existence its members have taught and preached the word of God to the people, whether within the fold or without, sustained the Church, and defended the deposit of divine truth with a fidelity, courage and fortitude that have caused the Friars Preacher, not inaptly to be called "watch dogs of the Lord."

The Dominicans, therefore, are to labor by preaching and teaching for the salvation of souls. This is their calling. It is the object to which all their studies are ordained. They are not monks, but friars—nay, "Preaching Friars." Yet as a background, preparation and aid to such an apostolic ministry Saint Dominic ordained that his brethren should cultivate many of the monastic observances, which were consecrated by ages of use. In his day they were considered essential to the religious life. Any attempt, at that time, to establish an order without some of these elements would have met with signal failure.

These cloistral exercises, indeed, modified to suit its vocation, are to the Dominican Order as leaven is to bread. They should so fill the hearts of its members with a love of God and their fellowman that it will overflow in a zealous and effective ministry for souls. The chivalrous founder of the institute himself set the example which he wished to be followed.

Brought up by a saintly mother in the best practices of the Catholic religion, and further trained by the Canons Regular, the man of God never dreamt of separating the contemplative from the active life. He would have the two closely interwoven in his Order; but he made contemplation the principle of action. He would have his brethren teach and preach to others what they had first learned for themselves in prayer, study and meditation. The choral duties and other religious exercises of the institute are ordained to this end no less than to the personal sanctification of the fathers themselves.

For the same purpose, those engaged in the apostolic ministry, as the greater number should be, are supposed to return ever and anon to their monasteries that they may replenish their own souls with a love of God, and renew their fervor for the salvation of others, by the practices peculiar to the religious state of life. Here, also, should they give themselves to serious study of the sacred sciences. All this, there can be no doubt, entered into Dominic's wise plan. He wished his Order to be a body of learned apostles; he felt that only through this twofold life could its spirit be kept alive, or its work produce the best results. [4]

Prior to the papal approbation of his institute, the holy patriarch himself and the companions whom he gathered around him in a spiritual warfare against the Albigenses had led just such an apostolic life as that

[4] While the Order of Saint Dominic should be, and is, a learned body as a whole, it does not follow from this that every Dominican is a learned man. Were great learning an indispensable requisite for membership in the institute, Father O'Brien would hardly have succeeded in becoming a Friar Preacher, and Saint Joseph's Province would have been deprived of one of its brightest ornaments.

which he would have his future spiritual children lead. Their days were given to labor in effort to convert sinners or heretics. The nights were largely spent in prayer and mortification that God might be pleased to bless their toils.

Doubtless the saint knew from his own personal experience the increase and impulse of zeal that come from solitary communion with God. The same experience, no doubt, taught him the difficulty which missioners, be they ever so careful, have to contend with in maintaining enthusiasm for a larger harvest of souls, and in keeping aglow the fire of divine and fraternal charity within their own bosoms. The greatest help to this is an occasional withdrawal from the swirl of the world.

For these reasons, no less than as a safeguard for their own spiritual welfare, the Order's founder rounded out his work by a happy combination of the active and contemplative life which he prescribed for his followers. The one, he felt, was the complement and the perfection of the other. [5]

This twofold life was not new in America in the days of Father O'Brien. As early as 1510 a little band of Dominicans had begun it on the island of Hispaniola, now known as Hayti. Thence, following in the wake of the conquistadors, it spread throughout Latin America. In all this extensive country Friars Preacher of the stamp of Pedro de Cordova, Antonio de Montesinos and Bartolmé de Las Casas, to name but a few of the Order's early representative men there, had accom-

[5] Father Peter Mandonnet, O. P., gives a splendid outline of Saint Dominic's ideal and of the history of his Order in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, XII, 354 ff.

plished untold good in behalf of both Church and State. They were amongst the principal defenders of the native Indian populations; they occupy an enviable place in history. [6]

Through prayer, meditation and the practice of penance our future hunter of souls had thoroughly imbued himself with the life of his institute. Although not a scholar, by a tireless habit of reading he had acquired a fair knowledge of its history both in the Old World and in the New. A man of reflection, he believed that its democratic spirit adapted it in an especial manner to the genius of our young American republic, that it fitted into and filled a place in the work of the American Church, that its specific labors could not fail to be the means of salvation for many souls. [7]

Of this, in fact, the earnest priest had proof in the toils of his confréres in Kentucky, Ohio and the northwest country, and it whetted his desire to be engaged in the active ministry. These labors he knew not only from his own observations and the lay people with whom he came into contact in the course of his priestly ministrations, but as well from the clergy who had taken part in them.

For instance, Father Samuel L. Montgomery, one of the first novices at Saint Rose's had seen service in both the north and the south. He had been one of

[6] The labors of the Dominicans in Latin America form some of the brightest chapters in the history of those countries.

[7] Father O'Brien was too spiritual a man to take any keen interest in politics or purely temporal affairs. Yet, it has come down to us, he believed that the democracy of his Order should appeal to the general public, and especially to the people of our democratic country. Pious as he was, like most Irishmen, he loved the United States, whilst still retaining a strong affection for the land of his birth.

Father O'Brien's professors through his entire course of theology. Bishop Miles had been his prior. Father Nicholas D. Young, another of the earliest candidates, and co-apostle of Ohio with Bishop Fenwick, was an occasional visitor at his alma mater, where he stirred our Friar Preacher's zeal by recitals of the work accomplished in that state.

Fathers Joseph T. Jarboe and Charles D. Bowling, both members of the community, were natives of the neighborhood in which Saint Rose's stood. Few men were more conversant with Kentucky's history. Rev. Elisha J. Durbin, born in the same state and an early student at Saint Thomas' College, but a priest of the diocese, called to see the fathers from time to time. He, too, loved to talk of the old times and trials.

Nor should we omit, in this connection, Rev. Robert A. Abell, one of the most zealous pioneer ecclesiastics in the Diocese of Bardstown. He had also been one of the first students at Saint Thomas' College attached to Saint Rose's; so had he spent some time in the novitiate there. Retaining his love for the institution and its members, the noted missionary and orator suffered no year to pass without at least one visit to this cradle of the religious life in the western country. Not infrequently he took advantage of such occasions to make a retreat.

Always a welcome visitor, Father Abell felt quite at home in the convent. Nor did he fail to entertain the younger men, in his interesting way, with stories of the earliest days of the place and its founders. Between him and Father O'Brien there arose a close bond of friendship, in consequence of which the eloquent

preacher, many years later, was selected to pronounce the funeral oration over the missionary at the mass said for him in the Dominican church of Louisville.[5] Tradition, indeed, tells us that Father Abell insisted on being allowed this favor.

Possibly Father Abell's influence was almost as great as that of Father O'Brien's companions in religion in sharpening the Preaching Friar's desire for the apostolic life of his Order. Be this as it may, at his own request, he was soon freed from the post of master of novices that he might devote himself more exclusively to search for souls. He then took up the work of the active ministry with the earnestness that characterized his every effort for good. There was not a nook or corner in the widely scattered country parish into which the faithful imitator of Saint Dominic failed to make his way. The several distant outlying missions attended from Saint Rose's at that time were also objects of his tender solicitude.

Everywhere the new missionary made regular pastoral rounds, seeking in what way he might be of spiritual aid to the flock of Christ. Nor were corporal works of mercy neglected among the poor, for whom he had a special care. The dominant note of his ministrations was zeal.

Father O'Brien, it would seem, then gave little promise of ever making a forceful preacher. Sincere and earnest though he was, his undue diffidence, his thin,

[5] The *Catholic Advocate*, February 4, 1871. Not so many years ago, it was not less edifying than interesting to hear the older members of the province tell of how religiously Father Abell (an extraordinary man he was) visited Saint Rose's once or twice in the earth's journey around the sun. There is one still living who remembers well those periodical visits, and recounts the pleasure they gave the community.

piercing voice, his quaint way of expressing himself, his appearance, and his awkward bearing, argued against success as an orator. Yet the effect which the unpretentious priest's early sermons are said to have produced at times, one should think, might have shown the keen observer that under the surface lay a latent power still to be developed.

However, the late master of novices had already become a skilled physician of souls. The good he made better. To bring the erring back to God he spared neither time nor energy. Even thus early in his priestly life Father O'Brien began to direct his attention towards non-Catholics, and to exercise a remarkable influence over those not of the faith. He brought a number into the Church. [9]

During the writer's boyhood and student days, even in the first years of his priesthood, there were a number of old people in Saint Rose's Parish who used frequently to speak of Father O'Brien's zeal and success along various lines at this period of his life. Two aged gentlemen, Messrs. William Mullican and Thomas Simms, the former in his ninety-second year and the latter in his ninetieth, still live and recall his efforts for good.

But this first field of the modern apostle's labors was soon exchanged for another which will form the subject of the next chapter.

[9] The *Freeman's Journal*, February 4, 1871, calls attention to the rare talent which Father O'Brien manifested thus early in his priestly life for reforming negligent Catholics, and for bringing non-Catholics into the fold of the Church.

CHAPTER VIII

IN OHIO

Perry County, Ohio, lies in the western extremity of the rough coal region that extends from the Ohio River into the present populous state of the same name. Most of the county is a rolling country. Many of the hills are steep, and not a few of them attain a great height. The soil is a strongly adhesive clay. In the olden days of poor roads, during the wet winter months, the mud along the highways had no bottom, and was almost every color of the rainbow. Travel was difficult, if not quite impossible. In the summer the dust, scarcely less deep than the mire of winter, flew in every direction. It told of the approaching wayfarer long before he came in sight.

More than one wag has remarked that when God made the earth, He had a mass of clay and mud left over. Not knowing what to do with the surplus, He tossed it into Ohio, and made Perry County. Another person of similar mental build wrote that in prehistoric times the Indian chiefs, leading their braves to war or on the hunt, were wont to cry out, when they reached this part of their realms: "Ho! We can go no farther. Here are the roads of Perry County." [1]

[1] The *Somerset Press*, Somerset, Ohio. The date of the paper is missing; but we know that it belongs to January or February, 1892.

Rutherford B. Hayes, a native of Ohio and the nineteenth president of the United States, used to say that, in his boyhood days, a foot-passenger, picking his way on the grass along a roadside of Perry County, descried a hat in the middle of the highway. Getting a pole, the gentleman reached out to secure the piece of apparel. To his surprise, when he upset the hat, he discovered that it was on a man's head. "Friend, are you stuck in the mud?" exclaimed the wayside traveller. "Oh, no; I'm all right," was the reply. "But I am a little uneasy about my horses and load of hay beneath me."

The soil, however, is not unproductive, while the climate is salubrious. The rolling hills present one splendid landscape after another. In the springtime, the traveller is charmed with successive panoramas of grain and meadow, foliage and blossoms of every hue. Many of the pioneer colonists chose these highlands for their new homes, in order to escape the miasma and malaria with which the richer level country was then infected because of the marshy, untilled soil.

Catholics were no exception to this rule. Indeed, less wise in the affairs of the world than their separated brethren, they often settled in the poorest localities, although they might just as easily have obtained homesteads in districts of greater fertility and promise. At times, the presence of a church, or the hope of having one, where they could practise their religion brought Catholics together, or determined their choice in location.

Such circumstances, it seems quite certain, had their part in the formation of the early Catholic settlement among the hills of Perry County, Ohio, the first in the state. John Finck and family came to the northern

part of the county in the opening years of the nineteenth century. They erected an inn where now stands the town of Somerset. Here they were soon joined by Jacob Dittoe and his family. Dittoe and Finck were brothers-in-law. Jacob Dittoe secured a homestead in the immediate neighborhood. He was a man of strong, practical faith—a leader in affairs religious. To Archbishop Carroll he wrote more than once soliciting spiritual succor for the souls of the incipient colony. Nor did God permit the prayers of this Teutonic Moses to go unrewarded.[2]

At the time, Father Edward D. Fenwick, O.P., so soon to become the Apostle of Ohio, lived at Saint Rose's, in Kentucky. Thence, as many readers of his life will doubtless recall, he traversed the state far and near in his ministry of salvation. In 1808, Father Fenwick planned a tour to Baltimore on business in connection with his Order.

More than likely Archbishop Carroll, who knew of the Dominican's zeal and his intended eastern journey, requested him by letter to travel through Ohio that he might visit the home of Jacob Dittoe. Be this as it may, we find the itinerant missionary in Perry County during the late summer or early fall of 1808. There, he himself tells us, he discovered three Catholic families of German extraction, comprising twenty persons in all.[3]

These neglected people, the missionary goes on to say, were overjoyed at the presence of a priest in their midst. His own joy, because of the happiness and con-

[2] O'Daniel (V. F.), *The Right Rev. Edward D. Fenwick, O. P.*, pp. 194–197, 202, 208, and *passim*.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 197 ff.

solation which he had brought them, he assures us, was scarcely less than theirs. Father Fenwick, no doubt, told the little band of faithful souls that he was on his way to Baltimore, and that he would make known their needs to Archbishop Carroll, under whose jurisdiction they were.[4] It is on record that the Dominican promised that, with the permission of his superiors, he would occasionally give them spiritual assistance.[5]

True to his word, Father Fenwick, despite his many labors in Kentucky, managed to find time for one or two visits to Ohio each twelvemonth. They were all made on horseback. As the years passed, the faithful increased in numbers. Their widely scattered locations not only lengthened the missionary's journeys, but also so multiplied his labors that a resident priest became an imperative necessity.

Accordingly, from 1816 Father Fenwick spent all his time in Ohio in order that he might devote himself exclusively to the interests of religion in that state. A little later (1818), he was joined by his nephew and confrère in religion, Rev. Nicholas D. Young, who had lately been ordained by Bishop Flaget, at Bardstown, Kentucky.

Until this time, Father Fenwick had had no home of his own. But now Jacob Dittoe, in gratitude for the

[4] *Life of Bishop E. D. Fenwick,* pp. 194 ff. Doctor Carroll had been made an archbishop in the previous April (1808). At the same time, Bardstown, Kentucky, was erected into an episcopal see, with Rev. B. J. Flaget, S. S., as its first bishop. Ohio was placed under his jurisdiction. But no word to this effect had reached the west at the time of Fenwick's visit at Somerset. Most likely, in fact, even Baltimore's venerable prelate had not yet received any notification of these changes in his vast diocese; for the letter of Archbishop Troy of Dublin, which gave him first information of them, did not reach him until September 25, 1808.

[5] *Ibid.,* pp. 201-202.

answer God had given to his prayer for a spiritual shepherd for the Catholics in the north, donated a half-section of land to the Order. On this ground the people hastened to erect a log church and convent, which were blessed and opened on December 6, 1818. Both these pioneer structures were placed under the patronage of Saint Joseph, the foster-father of our Lord. They were the first convent and Catholic temple of prayer in the state. [6]

Thus Saint Joseph's is the cradle of the Church in Ohio, the zealous Fenwick its father, Perry County its birthplace, Jacob Dittoe its sponsor and earliest benefactor.

In reward for his efficient labors, no less than as a guarantee for the propagation of the faith in Ohio, Father Fenwick was appointed the first bishop of Cincinnati. This was in June, 1821. But, owing to the slow mails at that day and the humble Friar Preacher's opposition to such an honor, his episcopal consecration did not take place until January 13, 1822. In the meantime Saint Joseph's was the center from which the message of eternal truth was carried throughout the length and breadth of the state. It remained one of the principal pivots of apostolic activity in Ohio during the nearly eleven years of Bishop Fenwick's episcopate. [7]

With the increase of priests under Archbishop Purcell, however, the fathers gradually withdrew from the more distant places. Nevertheless, this mother convent was still the home of missionaries who administered to the spiritual needs of many of the faithful, when Father O'Brien arrived there.

[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 218 ff.
[7] *Ibid.*, *passim*.

Such, in brief outline, is the early history of the institution where the subject of our narrative was to spend the next eight years of his life as a priest. In 1841, Saint Joseph's, because of its distance from Saint Rose's and the expense and difficulty of travel at that time, was made a novitiate and house of studies. This had been a cherished dream of Father Nicholas D. Young, who obtained permission from Rome to that effect during his provincialship. This was in 1834. But the plan was not put into execution until the second half of Father Charles P. Montgomery's term in the same office. [8]

Rev. George A. Wilson, a convert to the faith, was chosen for provincial in the fall of 1842. As the superior-to-be had known Father O'Brien in Kentucky, it was possibly at his suggestion that, while letters were expected from the Master General confirming the late election, the former novice master at Saint Rose's was brought to Saint Joseph's to fill the same office at this institution. Father Eugene H. Pozzo who had lately arrived from Europe, it was felt, should be relieved of the position in order that he might have more time for teaching and for perfecting himself in the knowledge of the English language.

Father O'Brien was deeply attached to the Convent of Saint Rose. It was his mother in the religious life. So was he enamored of his work there; he loved the simple, open-hearted people of the parish. It was a trial, therefore, for him to leave the place. But, true son of Saint Dominic that he was, he could not bear the thought of protest or hesitation, when the voice of authority had

[8] There are several documents on this matter in the archives of Saint Joseph's Priory, near Somerset, Ohio.

spoken. When, therefore, the order came for him to report in Ohio, at once and without a word he made ready for the journey.

In default of any document giving the date of the apostolic priest's departure from Saint Rose's, it can only be approximated from his last entry in the baptismal records of this time, November 13, 1842.[9] There was then no railroad connecting the points between which Father O'Brien had to travel. He therefore made the journey of some three hundred and fifty miles, as the winding roads then ran, on horseback. His few effects were carried in a pair of saddle-bags that hung on either side of his faithful steed.

One of Father O'Brien's obituarists takes pains to note that this long, tiresome journey was "a circumstance characteristic of his patience and humble spirit, as well as the apostolic simplicity of the times."[10] The encomiast might also have added that it was prophetic of the way in which the lonely traveller was to spend much of his future life in search of souls.

Just how long it took our missionary to make his way from Saint Rose's to Saint Joseph's by this slow method of transportation cannot now be determined. Yet, though the journey was at a time of the year when the roads were apt to be in bad condition, there are reasons for surmising that, with the consent of his superiors, he availed himself of the occasion thus offered

[9] The *Catholic Advocate* of February 4, 1871, says that the missionary was sent to Ohio in 1841; while the *Freeman's Journal* of the same date tells us that he went to Saint Joseph's early in 1842. But the baptismal records of Saint Rose's show that he did not leave that convent until near the end of the latter year.

[10] The *Freeman's Journal*, February 4, 1871.

to seek out neglected or wayward Catholics along the route.

Father O'Brien was not of the kind who would hesitate to ask for such permission. Neither would he willingly fail to take advantage of so favorable an opportunity for doing good. The date of his first baptismal record at Saint Joseph's, January 1, 1843, lends color to such a supposition, and indicates that he spent about a month on the journey.

Nor should we omit, in connection with the missionary's arrival at his new home, to mention an incident which, though it may appear ludicrous enough at this distant day, must have seemed quite serious both to him and to the community. It runs thus.

Father O'Brien reached Saint Joseph's late in the night. A stranger in the place, and thinking thus to spare his brethren the trouble of stabling his horse, he removed the bridle and saddle, turned the animal loose in the convent yard, and went into the house. Great was his surprise and chagrin the next day, when he learned that the horse could not be found. He bore the loss with his usual patience and spirit of resignation. Many weeks afterwards his sorrow was turned into joy by a letter which informed him that his steed had made its way back to Saint Rose's, in Kentucky.

Saint Joseph's crowns a commanding eminence about two miles south of Somerset. The country rolls away on every side in beautiful undulating landscapes. At the base of the hill on which the convent stands skirts a public thoroughfare. Yet the place is quiet and restful. The large yard in front of the establishment is studded with trees that almost shut out the passers-by from

view. It is an ideal home for prayer, study and meditation.

Archbishop Purcell, in accounts of his visits through the state for the *Catholic Telegraph,* refers more than once to the beautiful and advantageous location of this cradle of Catholicity in Ohio. [11] So again, a writer from Zanesville, Ohio, tells the editor of the same paper: "On the whole, I do not know a handsomer and more eligible situation west of the [Alleghany] mountains than Saint Joseph's. A beautiful garden, delightful water, and every convenience the country can afford suitable for such an establishment, make it enchanting to strangers." [12] Yet its site, like that of many of our early Catholic colleges and academies, is rather inaccessible.

Here Father O'Brien became master of novices a second time. However, we shall not dwell on this part of his life, for we could only repeat what has already been said of his labors in the same office in Kentucky. Suffice it to say that again he sought in every way to instill into the minds of the young candidates for the Order the high ideals and the spirit of humility, mortification, obedience and observance of rule with which all religious should be inspired.

Often has the writer heard the late venerable Father Osman A. Walker, a novice under Father O'Brien at the time, speak of his efforts and solicitude in this regard. Again the future missioner filled the responsible office for only a short period—perhaps for no more than a

[11] The archbishop, fortunately for the history of the Church in Ohio, was very conscientious in writing accounts of his tours and visitations through the diocese to the *Catholic Telegraph.* These communications are not signed; yet there is no doubt as to their authorship.

[12] The *Catholic Telegraph,* August 19, 1843.

year. But this was long enough for him to make a lasting impression. Indeed, wherever Father O'Brien labored, however brief the time, he left a memory that did not easily fade. [18]

The lay brothers, it has been handed down to us, were a part of the community in which Father O'Brien took the keenest interest. His own early experiences, perhaps, made his sympathy for them all the greater. His practical mind told him how useful such members are in a religious institute, while his zeal for the glory of the house of God and the good of their own souls made him anxious for their spiritual training. In Ohio, the brothers were also placed under Father O'Brien's charge. Nor was his care for them less solicitous than it was for the clerical students. The brothers loved him. In after years he attributed much of his success as a missionary to their prayers.

Perhaps the greatest spiritual advantage which the subject of our narrative derived for himself from the time which he spent as master of novices at Saint Joseph's, was the rounding out of his knowledge of the early traditions of the Order in the United States. The traditions of Ohio he had heard, of course, while in Kentucky. At Saint Joseph's he drank them in from their fountain-source.

The place was still redolent with such memories. The older people loved to tell of the early fathers and their labors. In the yard still stood the rude log cabin, or convent, that Bishop Fenwick and Father Nicholas D. Young had built and lived in for several years. It had

[18] As at Saint Rose's so at Saint Joseph's there is no record showing that Father O'Brien was master of novices. Tradition, however, leaves no doubt about the fact, or as to how he filled the office.

long served the community as a domicile, but was then used for the accommodation of guests. Father Young himself was stationed in Somerset, only two miles away. There he remained for nearly a year after Father O'Brien arrived at Saint Joseph's.

In Ohio, as in Kentucky, the community was small. Thus the conventual atmosphere was well adapted for perpetuating traditions. The conversations of the fathers were not unlike the fireside chats in the pioneer days, or in the old-time hovels of the persecuted Catholics in Ireland. Undoubtedly the hard but fruitful toils of Fathers Samuel C. Mazzuchelli and John T. Van Den Broek, who still labored in the northwest, were often discussed.

Such histories, we know, made a strong appeal to Father O'Brien's sympathetic heart. They quickened his zeal. He regarded them as precious heirlooms which he treasured beyond expression.

At times, at least, many of the early missions of the state were still attended from Saint Joseph's. Nearly all Perry County, in fact, remained under the care of the fathers stationed there. Thence also they journeyed, on evangelical excursions, into the surrounding counties of Licking, Fairfield, Hocking, Athens, Morgan and Muskingum, or even to more remote places. The priests were not many; and this made it necessary that all, whatever their other duties, should take part in the ministerial labors of the community. Thus, as he had done in Kentucky, so in Ohio, Father O'Brien perforce combined no little parochial work, both in the parish of Saint Joseph and on the missions, with his office of novice master. [14]

[14] Some of these missionary labors are shown by various church records.

In this way, our ambassador of Christ kept in touch with the apostolic work of the Order. Not only was this a life which he craved; it was also one for which he was singularly adapted. Again, therefore, he sought and obtained a release from the position of master of novices. The humble Friar Preacher shrank from posts of such delicate responsibility. He dreaded honors.

He had been successful as a trainer of recruits for the province. His exitus from the novitiate marks the beginning of an apostolate that was both rare and extraordinary. It has, we think, few parallels in the history of the Church in the United States. But of this the reader may form his own judgment as the story runs its course.

CHAPTER IX

PASTOR OF SAINT PATRICK'S

Father O'Brien was now assigned to exclusively missionary labors, with Saint Patrick's Parish designated as his special charge. The man of God, it is true, was no longer a novice in the ministry. Yet, because of the important part which the pastorate of Saint Patrick's played in his life, and because of his effective work there, we must pause in the drift of our narrative to give the reader the early history of this parish. The story will serve as a further background to our subject's future apostolic activities.

The erection of Saint Joseph's Church and Convent, in 1818, brought an influx of Catholics to Perry County, Ohio. Most of the newcomers were Irish, direct from their native land, or homeseekers from the pioneer German settlements in Pennsylvania.[1] Here and there was a family from Alsace or Lorraine. They ordinarily formed colonies according to their nationality. Often these Catholic communities were at so great a distance from Saint Joseph's that it was quite inconvenient, if not impossible, for the people to attend mass there—except at long intervals.

[1] Rev. Nicholas D. Young, O. P., writing from Somerset to his father, Nicholas Young, Nonesuch, near Washington, D. C., December 4, 1818, speaks of how rapidly Catholics are settling in Perry County since the church was begun (Archives of Saint Joseph's Priory).

For this reason, succursal churches were built in the more populous and remote localities. "Stations" were also started in distant places where the faithful were too poor or too few to erect and sustain a house of worship. Similar arrangements were made in the more immediate neighborhood of Saint Joseph's for the sake and convenience of the older folk. Saint Patrick's was an outgrowth of a "station" established for the aged and infirm.

In the second decade of the nineteenth century, a settlement of Irish immigrants began to form along Rush Creek, in Jackson Township, six miles or so south of Saint Joseph's. Among them were a number of old people. For the benefit of these, almost from the beginning of the pioneer colony, mass was said and confessions heard in the house of one Alexander Clark. Mr. Clark was an exemplary Catholic, as well as one of the most prosperous farmers in that part of the county. His home stood near where Wolf Station (now the thriving town of Junction City) was subsequently erected on the Somerset-Shawnee branch of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. The hospitable Clark fireside remained long a stopping place for the early missionaries of Perry County.[2]

The Rush Creek Colony prospered and increased. Alexander Clark deeded to the fathers ten acres of land at the crest of a hill about a mile south of the present Junction City.[3] On this picturesque site they erected a pretty little brick church, which was blessed and opened for divine service on Sunday, January 26, 1834. An ac-

[2] The old fathers of bygone days were wont frequently to speak of Alexander Clark's goodness and hospitality.

[3] Rev. D. J. Dunne, *A Brief History of St. Patrick's Church, Junction City, Ohio*, p. 4; *Diocese of Columbus, The History of Fifty Years*, p. 462.

count of the ceremony tells us that the sacred edifice was "a neat, well-finished building;" that its dimensions were fifty by thirty feet; and that, in spite of the cold weather, many were present for the event, which was an occasion of great joy for the good people.

Father N. D. Young, then provincial and one of Archbishop Purcell's vicars general, was delegated to dedicate the new temple of prayer. At the congregation's request no doubt, he placed it under the patronage of Saint Patrick, the apostle of Ireland. The sermon was preached by Father Thomas H. Martin, another of the efficient pioneer missionaries whom the Order of Saint Dominic gave to Ohio.[4]

The presence of a church, as was but natural, gave added impetus to the Rush Creek Settlement. New colonists, as well German as Irish, purchased homesteads within its limits that they might be in closer touch with a priest. A further increase came through births. Within ten years after the dedication of its church this settlement had become one of the largest congregations in Perry County. During his first twelvemonth in Ohio, as the parish records show, Father O'Brien paid more than one visit to Saint Patrick's, and was thus no stranger there. But now (1844) he received an appointment as pastor of that mission.

With this assignment fairly commenced Father O'Briens' missionary career. Nor was he slow, as his eloquent eulogist assures us, to develop "the latent germs of some great faculties, with which it had never been known that he was endowed—of which he was himself,

[4] The *Catholic Telegraph*, Cincinnati, February 7, 1834.

until then, perhaps totally unconscious." [5] No sooner, indeed, had our Friar Preacher entered upon this pastorate than he began to manifest no mean talent for organization and direction. He had already revealed an almost mysterious influence over men.

Putting his whole heart and soul into his work, the ambassador of Christ gathered his people around him, divided the scattered parish into districts, organized bands of laborers to assist him in the better Christian instruction of the Catholics. In each section he selected (generally from among the women) those most capable of teaching, and placed them in charge of a catechism class for the children which he arranged to be held in some central house of the neighborhood. Nor did Father O'Brien fail to insist on regularity on the part of both teachers and pupils at these miniature catechetical schools. Parents were admonished of their duty to instruct their little ones in Catholic doctrine at home, as well as to see that they attended the classes which he had instituted for them.

There were then but few communities of sisters in Ohio. In default of Catholic schools, the zealous pastor felt that only by such district catechetical schools could the children of his parish be properly trained in their religion. He realized that the little time which he could give them on Sundays, unless supplemented by other means, was all too insufficient to enable them, in after years, to give a reason for the faith that was in them.

[5] The *Catholic Advocate*, Louisville, Kentucky, February 4, 1871. This beautiful biographical notice on Father O'Brien is not signed. But we know from the late Father Arthur V. Higgins himself that it was written by him. Had we not Father Higgins' own word for it, his style and the tradition of the province would leave no doubt as to its authorship. Father Higgins was born in Perry County, Ohio. From boyhood he knew Father O'Brien well.

Parents, the missionary well knew, were not unfrequently incapable of correctly instructing their own children. He believed also that the measures which he had adopted were the best (perhaps the only) way then available of keeping the younger generations true to their religion. Between and after masses, on Sundays, he examined the youthful portion of his flock in what they had learned from the teachers he had appointed over them. To this he added instructions of his own.[6]

Still another measure which our pastor adopted for the benefit, both spiritual and temporal, of his parish was the establishment of a Catholic school near the church. This, of course, necessity obliged him to place in charge of secular teachers. Although it could be held for only a few months in the year, while the weather was good, it proved a blessing to many poor children. Nor should we forget that it was one of the first schools of the kind in the country parishes of Ohio.

The Dominican's greatest affliction, at the beginning of his pastorate, was his inability to say mass at Saint Patrick's every Sunday. There were many missions and stations scattered here and there, but few fathers to attend them. Thus only at Saint Joseph's and in

[6] The authority for practically all the statements made hitherto in this chapter without references is tradition and notes taken long ago from conversations with old people and priests who lived during the days of Father O'Brien's pastorate at Saint Patrick's and recent talks with aged persons in Perry County who still remember the missionary and his labors. Among the laity who have gone to the great beyond since affording us information, and whose memories were brightest, and interest keenest, were two James Finck, Mr. and Mrs. David Finck, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Scallan, Alexander and Charles Flowers, Charles Kintz, Mr. and Mrs. Martin Scott, and Mrs. Matthew Kernan. Mrs. Kernan, whose maiden name was McKinley, spent the early years of her life (until marriage) in the vicinity of Saint Patrick's Church. Her memory of the old days was extraordinary. These remarks also apply to the rest of the present chapter.

Somerset, the two largest congregations, could mass be given on each Sabbath. From early 1845, however, this difficulty was removed, as regards Father O'Brien's parish, by the arrival of more priests. Our missionary, the reader need not be told, hailed the coming of these additional forces with unfeigned joy, for they gave him a freer hand in the care of his beloved flock. [7]

Father O'Brien loved children for their innocent hearts. Although he was a man of few words, his simple, tender way of dealing with them won their confidence and affection, made them responsive to his efforts in their behalf. Whilst he did not neglect the spiritual wants of the women in his parish, his zeal went out in an especial manner to its men. This portion of his flock, he felt, needed guidance more particularly. Nor did he leave anything undone in order to make them better, and to bring them nearer to God. The results of his work may be seen to this day.

From the beginning of his pastorate, our missionary sought to inspire the young men of Saint Patrick's with a love for Catholic literature. He wished them to contract a wholesome habit of good reading. One of his purposes in this was that they might become better instructed in Christian doctrine, as well as be better disposed to practise their religion. Another motive was that they might be preserved from the danger of falling

[7] Father Francis S. Vilarrasa came to the province late in 1844, and was stationed at Saint Joseph's. Father Nicholas R. Young, ordained at Rome, returned with him, and was assigned to the same place. Father James Whelan, later the second bishop of Nashville, Tennessee, was ordained at Saint Joseph's, in 1846, and remained there. At first, according to the old *Catholic Directories*, mass was said at Saint Patrick's only once a month; then it was said twice a month. From this period the holy sacrifice was offered up every Sunday and holy day of obligation, and at times during the week.

into the bad habits largely due to idleness and evil company.[8] In a quiet, unoffensive way, he always had an eye to the conversion of those not of the faith. Thus his efforts along this line had a further object, the spiritual welfare of his non-Catholic neighbors. He felt that well-read laymen, by reason of their associations, may often accomplish more than the priest.

No pastor could be more earnest in fostering sodalities than was this good Dominican. Practically all his parish belonged to those which he established, or found already in existence. For the Rosary Society he had a special love, and showed a particular zeal. Temperance also found in him an ardent promoter.

Intemperance, then a crying evil, was one of the questions that demanded the attention of the fourth provincial council of Baltimore, held in May, 1840. The assembled bishops urged pastors everywhere to encourage total abstinence societies. They even issued a joint pastoral letter in the cause of temperance. The Friars Preacher in Ohio took up the matter with ardor, and established this society in all their missions.[9]

Father O'Brien found the society in a flourishing condition at Saint Patrick's, when he assumed the pastorate there. With all his soul did he exhort the men to remain faithful to their good resolutions. Temperance rallies were much in vogue, but nowhere were they held in a more whole-hearted manner than in his parish. On one

[8] It is still a matter of a living tradition how often and strongly Father O'Brien used to preach against idleness and evil associations as the root of all evil.

[9] *Concilia Provincialia Baltimorae Habita ab Anno* 1829 *usque ad Annum* 1849, p. 171; the *Catholic Telegraph*, November 6, 1841, and October 14, 1843. The *Telegraph* and other Catholic papers speak of these temperance societies a number of times.

occasion at least he headed a procession that was composed of nearly his entire congregation. With banners flying they proceeded on horseback to Saint Joseph's, where a similar meeting was in session. The children, at the time of their first communion, he had take the pledge until they should become one and twenty years of age.

In this connection, we may notice an incident that can hardly fail to be of interest. A woman in Saint Patrick's Parish kept a rather disorderly grog-shop which offered a temptation to the people, and stood in the way of the pastor's work for good. Father O'Brien pleaded with her; begged and exhorted her to give up her nefarious trade; promised that, if she did, God would take care of her; threatened that, should she continue in her ways, she would come to want and suffering.

All was in vain. The realization of the missionary's menace, however, did not long delay. This woman was soon reduced to abject poverty. On her death-bed she sent for him to come and reconcile her with God. He buried her at his community's expense.

How the modern apostle and his confrères succeeded in their efforts in behalf of temperance, as in their zeal for religion, whether among the faithful or those who did not belong to the fold of the Church, may be seen from no less a testimony than that of Archbishop Purcell. Writing to the *Catholic Telegraph* of his visit to the scattered rural parishes of Perry County, in the late summer of 1848, that prelate says:

> ...In all these churches there were many edifying and highly intelligent converts confirmed, some of whom had been previously, in the presence of the congregation, baptized. We were exceedingly

gratified at these results in places where we could not have anticipated their occurrence.

At Saint Patrick's, the zealous Father O'Brien celebrated the anniversary of the establishment of the Temperance Society in his congregation. Between two and three thousand persons walked in procession with banners and music;[10] and, after an address which lasted an hour, and which was delivered by the Bishop from a stage erected in the woods near the beautiful and large new church, all partook of a splendid repast furnished by the congregation. It was, altogether, one of the best "got up" affairs we have ever witnessed, or that, we think, could be witnessed anywhere. The worthy Pastor assured us that there had not been one solitary instance of intoxication among his flock, for the last four years! Would to God that the like might be said of every other.[11]

The same ordinary rarely, if ever, fails to write to his diocesan organ in terms like the above, after he has made a visit to this part of his diocese. In the *Catholic Telegraph* of August 20, 1846, for instance, we find a very pleasant communication from that prelate, in which he praises the zeal of the priests in Perry County. It closes with these words anent the subject of our narrative: "The zealous Father O'Brien is building a noble church, some hundred by sixty feet, at St. Patrick's, seven miles from Somerset. [He is] to commence a similar building at Rehoboth [as] soon as this labor of love is completed."[12]

From house to house the indefatigable missionary, when at home, made his way in almost one continuous round of his congregation. His faithful horse even

[10] Evidently this temperance rally was attended by people from all parts of Perry County.

[11] *Catholic Telegraph*, September 21, 1848.

[12] The dimensions of Saint Patrick's are one hundred and two feet in length by about fifty in width.

came to know where Catholics lived. How tedious and toilsome were these parochial visits during the winter months may readily be seen from the description of the highways given in the previous chapter.

But Father O'Brien could not be dismayed by difficulties. If the roads were impassible on horseback, he stuffed his trousers into his boot-tops and trudged through the fields or over the hills. Often might he be obliged to walk miles before he could cross a stream beyond which lived some family or person whom he wished to see. True shepherd of souls that he was, the Preaching Friar seemed never to weary of such pastoral tours.

Perhaps no better idea of these parochial visits can be formed than from the following description, which is in substance that which the writer has often heard, years ago, from the old people of Perry County.

In visiting his parish, Father O'Brien rarely tarried more than a few minutes at any home. If the weather were good, he usually rode up to the front yard, hailed the people at the gate, and spoke to them from his horse. To see the men he went to the fields or to the barns. In case of bad weather he entered the house; but he seldom took a seat, unless when much fatigued.

On these visits the hunter of souls, as he was frequently called, always wanted to see the younger members of the family. For the children he thoughtfully carried a supply of holy pictures or other presents of small value, yet calculated to win their affection. He knew everyone; nor was anyone omitted in his queries about the health of the household. Its temporal affairs also fell under the pastor's solicitude, for his tender heart went out to sorrow in its every form.

Next came matters of religion, a subject which was ever uppermost in Father O'Brien's mind, and one which he always sought to introduce through the things of the world.

In this connection, there never failed to be a series of pointed questions, but put in a most kindly and paternal manner. For instance: "Is everyone faithful in the reception of the sacraments?" "Are the children being properly instructed in their religion?" "Do they attend the catechetical school in the neighborhood?" "Have they catechisms?" "Has everybody a prayer-book?"

With the two articles last mentioned the pastor ever went supplied, that he might distribute them wherever needed. He had a happy faculty of learning whatever he desired to know in the shortest time. Then, with a few brief words, affable and direct to the point, that never failed to bring joy and consolation alike to young and old, he went his way for a similar visit at the home of another parishioner.

Everywhere, the old inhabitants of Perry County were wont to say, he was a welcome guest. Brief though the time he stayed, they considered the visit of the shepherd of their souls a blessing for the household. He was of the people, and whilst ever the priest and pastor, he made himself as one of them. Perhaps not even Saint Paul more truly became all things to all men that he might gain all for Christ.

In those days, it will be recalled, Catholic clergymen in the United States did not wear the Roman collar. Father O'Brien was anything rather than a dandy. Although clean of person and in his clothes, he was

noticeably careless about his dress. It never seemed to sit well upon him. Thus, in spite of the high hat which he *always* wore, the stranger, at first sight, would take the American apostle for no more than an ordinary man who was obliged to practise strict economy.

On one occasion, as he was on his way to visit some of his parishioners, the missioner chanced upon a Mr. McG.... plowing in a field by the wayside. Because the ground was rough and full of stumps, the farmer took vengeance on his horses by cursing and whipping them for the jerks and pokes that he got. This, of course, only made matters worse. Father O'Brien, whose presence had not been detected, stopped to chide the man for his cruelty and profanity. With an angry oath he was invited to come and try his hand, and see whether, priest though he was, he could hold his tongue or temper.

To this challenge the Lord's anointed readily consented, for he had not forgotten how to do such work. Possibly gratified at the change of masters, the team now moved along smoothly and quietly, as if in rebuke of the farmer's roughness and vulgarity. When he had turned a few furrows, Father O'Brien calmly said: "Now, my friend, do you see what a little patience will do?" He then heard the plowman's confession, and left him a better Christian.

Rarely did the zealous Friar Preacher rest from his toil. He showed charity towards all, except himself. He seemed never to sleep; he ate as sparingly as did the ancient hermits of the deserts. People wondered not merely how he did so much, but rather how he could live on so little food and with such little repose. It is small

wonder that they came to regard the servant of God not only as a most holy man, but even as a person endowed with miraculous powers. He became almost as much the physician of their bodies as the physician of their souls.

Father O'Brien was ever afire with zeal. The man's whole power seemed centered on every point under his charge—"composing all differences, recalling all who had gone astray, relieving the necessities of the poor, consoling the afflicted, administering to the dying the last consolations of religion." [13] On Sundays, at the church, he was especially aglow with a desire to reform, correct, make better, do good. His sermons were compared to the voice of John the Baptist crying out: "Prepare ye the way of the Lord; make straight His paths."

One is not surprised, therefore, to read: "The congregation became, under his guidance and care, a model to all congregations. The temperance, the purity, the zeal, the piety of the people were truly edifying. The pastor's spirit had passed into the flock, and was producing the flowers and fruits of every virtue." [14] These happy results were largely produced by infusing into the hearts of his parishioners much of the shepherd's own personal love for the Blessed Sacrament, the center and fountain of all Catholic devotion. In season and out of season did he inculcate the practice of frequent communion.

The apostolic man's field of labor, however, was not circumscribed by the limits of his own congregation.

[13] *Catholic Advocate,* February 4, 1871, as in note 5.
[14] *Ibid.*

With the appointment of his superiors he exercised a general direction and superintendence over the various missions attended by the fathers in Perry County. In spite of his labors in Saint Patrick's Parish, nothing escaped Father O'Brien's vigilance within the wide circumference of his spiritual jurisdiction. Like an eagle from its lofty wing, he seemed to scan the whole area with a glance of his ever watchful eye.[15]

To some it almost appeared that the ambassador of Christ could be in two places at the same time. Somerset was then the capital of Perry County. There, quite naturally, trouble occurred oftener than in the other parishes. On more than one occasion, when some young man had got into a mess, Father O'Brien unaccountably appeared on the scene, riding one horse and leading another, which he had borrowed from a neighbor on the way.

To the victim of youthful indiscretion he would say quietly, but none the less effectively: "Come, my son, and take a ride with me." No one ever thought of disobeying him. Then the pastor of Saint Patrick's led the abashed man to a place of safety. Nor would he permit his protégé to leave him until he felt that he could behave himself. In such cases it is hard to say which was the greater, the missionary's zeal or his charity.

It was as if another Jean-Baptiste Vianney had appeared in Ohio. The parish of Ars, we venture to believe, could scarcely have entertained a deeper veneration for their saintly curé than was that in which the Catholics of Perry County held the apostolic Dominican. Not only this; Father O'Brien soon became one of the

[15] *Ibid.*

most widely known priests in the state in which he then labored; his fame also spread far beyond the limits of Ohio. People came from great distances to consult him. Archbishop Purcell is said to have regarded him as a most holy man, nay, a veritable apostle.

This Friar Preacher had a real passion for hearing confessions. He spent long hours in the tribunal of divine mercy. God, it would appear, blessed him with a remarkable insight that often enabled him to read the soul.

It was perhaps this, together with his zeal, that led him into ways which in another would have been considered at least inordinate. In Father O'Brien they not only appeared natural, but were even what people seemed to expect. Wherever he met a sinner, he induced him to go to confession. The roadside, a shady nook, or other secluded place served as well as a church for that sacred purpose.

Saint Patrick's pastor was ever on the outlook for negligent and fallen-away Catholics. He never failed to make these the subject of his inquiries, whether on his pastoral visits or other journeys. To reconcile them to God and to make them good Christians was another of his darling passions.

Non-Catholics also claimed much of the zealous priest's thought. Their conversion was the object of many of his most fervent prayers. The missionary's goodness, candor and charity, by winning the hearts of men, broke down all barriers of religious prejudice. Remarkable was the esteem that non-Catholics of all classes entertained for the humble, unpretentious clergyman. He brought a number into the Church. [16]

[16] *Catholic Advocate, February* 4, 1871; *Freeman's Journal*, February 4, 1871; manuscript of sermon preached by Rev. Hugh F. Lilly at Father O'Brien's funeral.

But of the apostolate mentioned in the last three paragraphs we shall have frequent occasion to speak in the course of our narrative. Suffice it here to state that he strove in every way for the enlargement and renewal of God's kingdom on earth.

Father O'Brien's labors were rendered the more difficult from the fact that there was then no rectory at Saint Patrick's. None had been built because the priests who attended the missions were supposed to return to the monastery after the toil of the day. [17] This our pastor never neglected to do, when at all possible, for none could be more exact than he in the observance of the rule. Fortunately, if obliged to spend the night in his own parish, and the sacristy proved too cold, the home of Alexander Clark's family offered a shelter that was congenial, comfortable and convenient. This Christian household always kept a room prepared for priests. The door was ever open to them; the table ready to be laid.

On the other missions God's harvester sought food and lodgment with the best Catholics in the neighborhood. In the congregation of Rehoboth, for instance, he found a no less hospitable reception at the pioneer hearth of one John Noon than was that given him by Alexander Clark on Rush Creek. [18]

The reader will not have forgotten that our Friar Preacher, perhaps largely because of his diffidence, gave

[17] Father Dunne (*A Brief History of Saint Patrick's Church*, p. 9) tells us that the rectory was built in 1854. This was during Father O'Brien's provincialate.

[18] The older fathers, in the early days of the writer's priesthood, used to mention the names of Mr. and Mrs. John Noon with affection. After the death of Alexander Clark, in 1839, his family erected a house within some two hundred feet of the church. This served as a stopping place for the missionaries until a rectory was built.

little promise of becoming a good preacher during the first years of his priesthood. In Ohio, however, despite his high and rather shrill voice, awkwardness, ungainly appearance and other disadvantages, he developed into a forceful speaker. Yet in the Dominican's sermons (as it was with all his efforts for religion and souls) it was the earnest, sincere messenger of God, far more than his language, or his delivery, or what he said, that not only appealed to the audience, but even held it spell-bound. People flocked to hear him, and went away the better.

In Father O'Brien, if ever this were the case, it was the grace of heaven, not the man, that gave his sermons a power, and produced an effect, which perhaps could not have come from any merely natural gift of oratory, however exalted. Apart from a deep zeal, a profound earnestness and a fair amount of knowledge, the *man* possessed practically none of the qualities deemed essential for a successful public speaker. This Dominican, however, was considered an exception to all rules. [19]

In the midst of his busy apostolic life, as the reader has doubtless gathered from the letters of Archbishop Purcell, Father O'Brien found time to erect a church for his people. The first Saint Patrick's had become too small to accommodate the congregation when he took it in charge. Although the difficulty of getting means, for it was a period of financial depression, told him that such an enterprise would require immense toil and exertion, the new pastor soon set about the erection

[19] It has often been said that those who heard Father O'Brien preach could not understand how it was that he made such an impression on them. Not a few declared that they saw a dove or a halo over his head whilst he delivered his sermon.

of a larger temple of prayer for the growing parish. The apostolic man had a strong faith in help from above. Besides, his obituarist assures us, "it was under adverse circumstances that his courage and resolution appeared firmest." [20]

The new Saint Patrick's, begun in 1845 or 1846, was built around the old church, that divine service might not be interrupted meantime. Later, when it became necessary to take down the inner edifice, a horse-shed was fitted up for a place of worship. Here the congregation now attended mass and heard the word of God for many months.

In co-operation with their pastor the people contributed generously of their brawn and muscle towards these needed improvements. They could give little in the coin of the realm. By dint of tireless energy, however, the structure rose rapidly for the time, place and circumstances. Thus, in the fall of 1847, Father O'Brien could write to Bishop Purcell:

Somerset, Perry Co., Ohio,
October 20th, 1847.

Right Rev. Father:—

Thanks be to Almighty God, our new church of Saint Patrick is nearly completed. It will be ready for divine service about the middle of November. I deem it, therefore, my duty to write to you, in the expectation that we shall have the honor of seeing you amongst us to dedicate this new temple to the Almighty. If your Right Rev. Paternity could make it convenient to perform this august ceremony, be pleased to write to me immediately, and I will let you know the exact time when we will be prepared. Otherwise, let me know when it would best suit your arrangements to be present.

[20] *Catholic Advocate* as in note 5.

The winter is drawing nigh, and the congregation is suffering much for want of a place for divine worship. Therefore, we have used every effort, and made every sacrifice, to complete the building; and, with the blessing of heaven, we hope to have our expectations realized. All that now remains, is for you, Right Rev. Father, to crown the glorious work, by dedicating it to the service of God under the invocation of Ireland's great Apostle.

Hoping to hear from you soon, and begging your blessing, and a share in your good prayers, I remain your obedient and devoted son in J[esus] Christ.

M. A. O'Brien, O.P.,
Pastor of St. Patrick's Church.

Right Rev. J. B. Purcell, D.D. [21]

The foregoing letter is the earliest that we have been able to find from Father O'Brien's pen. In fact, it is one of the very few still extant. Tradition tells us that he seldom wrote, and that in his letters, as in his conversations, he was as brief as was compatible with civility. The document just given, we take it for granted, is typical of all that he indited on matters of business. Nor is this its only value. It shows the missionary's zeal, together with his spirit of piety, reverence and obedience.

We have not discovered any account of the dedication of the new Saint Patrick's, nor whether Archbishop Purcell performed the ceremony. Tradition and a sketch of the Church in Perry County that appeared in *The Collegian*, published at Saint Joseph's College, tell us that it took place before the close of 1847. [22]

[21] Cincinnati Diocesan Archives.

[22] The *Baltimore Catholic Mirror* of January 28, 1854, gives a copy of the article that appeared in *The Collegian*. This we have used in default of the original. Archbishop Purcell had been at Saint Patrick's the year before, and his busy life would hardly have permitted him to make another visit so soon afterwards.

SAINT PATRICK'S CHURCH, JUNCTION CITY, OHIO.

INTERIOR OF SAINT PATRICK'S CHURCH.

Circumstances indicate that the ordinary of the diocese delegated one of the priests at Saint Joseph's, most likely Father O'Brien himself, to bless and open the house of worship for his own people.

When completed Saint Patrick's was an edifice in which both pastor and parishioners, all things considered, might take an honest pride. It was a pretty Gothic structure of some one hundred feet in length by nearly fifty feet in width, and stood on a commanding eminence in a picturesque rural district.[23] Many long considered it one of the handsomest and most solidly built country churches in the State of Ohio.

The *Catholic Telegraph,* giving an account of a visit to Saint Joseph's by the Most Rev. Samuel Eccleston, archbishop of Baltimore, in the last days of June and the first of July, 1848, tells us:

> On Thursday the Archbishop visited, one of the Fathers accompanying him, the beautiful church of St. Patrick about eight miles from St. Joseph's; he was highly delighted to find so fine and handsome a church in the woods, or rather in a place so remote from what is generally considered the refined world. That church, as he observed, would be an honor for its beauty of architecture, as well as dimensions, in any of our cities. The Rev. Anthony O'Brien began it, and did not cease to labor for it till he had seen it completed. To his zeal in a great measure the Catholics of St. Patrick's are indebted for their church and all the ornaments that embellish its interior.
>
> The Archbishop spent the night under the hospitable roof of the pious family of the late Alexander Clark, who during his life had been the principal benefactor of St. Patrick's. In the morning of Wednesday the good people of that congregation, with an almost electric notice, only heard that the Archbishop would celebrate

[23] Father Dunne's pamphlet as in note 17.

Mass at St. Patrick's that morning. A large concourse of people were there by six o'clock. The Archbishop, after giving a very paternal address, complimented them for their zeal, and passed some high encomiums on the never-to-be-forgotten example, in laboring for them, of their zealous pastor. He then offered up the Holy Sacrifice in their behalf, and gave them his benediction.

All returned home gratified that the Archbishop of Baltimore had honoured them so much by his visit, and was so much pleased with that church, the delight of their hearts and the refuge of all their troubles in this life, as well as [the source of] their hopes in a future world. [24]

In connection with this sacred edifice we have a noteworthy example of our missionary's gift for converting educated non-Catholics. Where others had failed he succeeded.

Mr. Thomas D. Spare, a graduate of an architectural college, London, England, had designed and erected several Catholic churches in the United States. Nor had overtures been neglected for his conversion. Father O'Brien engaged him to build Saint Patrick's. While employed on this work not only did Spare become a Catholic; he was even so grateful for the grace given him that he determined to purchase a plot of land, build a house, and spend the rest of his life near where he had received the light of truth. There he died on April 3, 1871, less than three months after the death of Father O'Brien. [25]

Nor did Saint Patrick's give Father O'Brien his only experience in building at this time. In the fall of 1846, work was begun on a new priory at Saint Joseph's. From

[24] The *Catholic Telegraph*, July 18, 1848.

[25] Dunne, *History of St. Patrick's*, as in note 17; Bishop Purcell, Cincinnati, October 29, to Thomas Spare, Saint Joseph's, Somerset, Ohio (Archives of Saint Joseph's Priory); tradition and talks with old people.

the outset, the supervision of the structure seems to have been largely entrusted to him. It was certainly finished under his care—apparently in 1848. Furthermore, a college at Saint Joseph's, a new church to replace the old one at Rehoboth, and a house of prayer for the mission on South Fork Creek were under consideration.

These edifices, it would seem, were also to be superintended by the missionary.[26] But hard times and various changes delayed their commencement until the pastor of Saint Patrick's had been honored with the highest office in the gift of the province. He then brought them to completion under his own authority, thus acquiring the name of "the church-building priest," which he still enjoys in Perry County.

One marvels how the tireless Dominican could combine the office of syndic, or procurator, at Saint Joseph's Convent with the labors that have just been described. Yet, strange to say, we find his name given for that office for the two years immediately preceding the close of his pastorate at Saint Patrick's.[27] Stranger still, tradition tells us that he filled the post quite satisfactorily. It was doubtless assigned to him that he might have a freer hand in the constructive operations under way.

The new church at Junction City and the convent at Saint Joseph's obliged Father O'Brien to do much travelling in order that he might obtain the means necessary

[26] The *Catholic Telegraph*, August 20, 1846, and September 21, 1848; Rev. Sadoc Vilarrasa, Somerset, to Archbishop Purcell, Cincinnati, May 25, 1848 (Cincinnati Diocesan Archives); manuscript "Memoranda of the Diocese of Boston," Vol. IV, p. 18 (Diocesan Archives of Boston).

[27] It is only in the old *Catholic Directory* that we have found Father O'Brien mentioned as procurator; but this is strongly substantiated by tradition.

for their erection. These simply could not be had in Perry County. For this reason, our Friar Preacher journeyed to Saint Louis and New Orleans, New York and Boston, not to mention other places. All along his route, for the bishops gave him diocesan faculties most readily, he plied his vocation of harvesting souls with extraordinary success.

But of his trips and work abroad future pages will tell. Suffice it here to say that the missionary always made arrangements for the proper care of his parish while he was away. These absences explain the frequent, and sometimes long breaks in his entries on the church records. [28]

It should be noted, however, that the report of the apostle's zeal and influence for reforming sinners had spread far and wide. For this reason, a mutual friend took advantage of his presence in New York to tell him about two young men who had become notoriously addicted to drink. Father O'Brien heard their con-

[28] Father Hugh F. Lilly as in note 16. Not many years ago, Father O'Brien's journeys to New York, Saint Louis and New Orleans, and his extraordinary missionary campaigns along the route, were a common topic of conversation. The Right Rev. Benedict J. Fenwick ("Memoranda of the Diocese of Boston," IV, 18) notes his presence in Boston at the close of May, 1850, and that he was given permission to collect for a week.

When Father O'Brien was on missionary or collecting tours, others took his place at Saint Patrick's. On one occasion, so we are told, this task fell to Father Vilarrasa. The Spanish priest was almost a dwarf in stature —so small, indeed, that there had been some hesitation about ordaining him. He was also a poor equestrian. The little man rode a sorrel horse that was tall, loose-jointed, clumsy and short-coupled. Its name was "Jack." The saddle sat almost on its shoulders. When Father Vilarrasa reached "Center Branch" of Rush Creek, some half mile from the convent, his awkward steed drew aside to take a drink. A sudden jerk of the bridle, as Jack bent his head to the water, sent the unskilled rider sprawling over the animal's neck prone into a pool waist-deep. The half-drowned clergyman scrambled to his feet, waded out of the stream, let his horse go its way, returned to the house, changed his clothes, and then made the journey afoot.

fessions, and made them promise to do better. But fearing their weakness and the temptations of evil company, he induced them to accompany him to Ohio. There he watched over them until they became good Catholics and excellent citizens.

It was perhaps on the same occasion that one, who knew of the magnetic power of this hunter of souls, requested him to undertake the conversion of a young man in the great metropolis who had grown shockingly remiss in his religious duties. This was sufficient to arouse Father O'Brien's zeal. So he proceeded to the place where this man worked. But the latter had heard of the scheme for his spiritual betterment. Seeing Father O'Brien enter the store, he rushed up stairs. The priest followed in hot pursuit, and caught the fugitive on the top story of the structure. There occurred one of those hasty but effectual shrifts characteristic of the Dominican's career, with the usual result of a better life.

It was as a vicar of Christ, laboring with his whole heart for the salvation of souls, that our Friar Preacher gained and wielded an extraordinary power over men, whatever their belief or their station in life. He uniformly sought to avoid controversy on religious matters, and aimed to bring people into the Church rather through plain exposition of her doctrine. For antagonism he had an instinctive aversion.

But at this period of his life he was obliged, by repeated and offensive banters, to enter the arena of debate with a well-known non-Catholic divine of Ohio, Rev. Thomas Harper. The contest took place in a grove in southern Perry County. Father O'Brien's

familiarity with Scripture and history now stood him in fine stead. Nor did it take his opponent long to realize that he had met his master.

It is no matter for wonder that such a priest's pastorate should be treasured and should leave a lasting remembrance. The document we here append from one of his former parishioners but reflects the trend of the recollections and the affections of all the old people (it is remarkable how many there still are whose memories go back to his days) of Saint Patrick's and the adjacent missions. Its author, at the time of his writing, was nearly eighty-eight years of age, yet well preserved and of good mind and memory. In a letter from Junction City, Ohio, dated July 12, 1922, John McGreevy says:

Reverend and dear Father:

I was a boy of eight or nine years of age when Father O'Brien became pastor of St. Patrick's congregation. I made my first communion under him, and one of the happiest recollections of my life is the care and solicitude with which he taught us children our catechism, and prepared us for this momentous step in our lives.

His zeal in this, however, was but typical of all his pastoral cares. No priest, I candidly believe, ever labored more assiduously for his flock than did Father O'Brien for the spiritual betterment of the people of St. Patrick's parish. He seemed to never grow tired in his ministrations to their souls. But, a most kindly man, his efforts extended also to their bodies and temporal welfare. There was no sorrow or trial which he did not seek to soften or lighten.

I remember well the building of the present St. Patrick's Church. It was at a time when money was scarce; and it required a man of Father O'Brien's indomitable energy to carry the undertaking to a successful issue. He traveled in every direction to collect the necessary means for it. The congregation, unable to give but little in cash, contributed labor. In this connection, I may mention how the old people in my younger days used to speak of the way he ever

combined business relations to awaken the consciences of those with whom he had to deal.

You know, of course, how he was ever on the watch for men who were backsliders, or were lukewarm or negligent in their religious duties. He made such as these go to confession wherever he happened to meet them. Father O'Brien seems to have had a special gift for this sort of work. And strange to say, unusual as was his way of thus reconciling sinners to God, it never gave offense. His simplicity, goodness and zeal touched the heart, won the confidence, and made his appeal well nigh irresistible. Was it the grace of God?

All Perry County was scarcely less the field of Father O'Brien's priestly zeal than was St. Patrick's congregation. He likewise made many missionary journeys into other parts of Ohio. By the Catholics everywhere he was considered a saint. No one seemed able to resist his requests. All felt that they were richly rewarded for whatever they gave him, or did for him. Protestants held him in almost as high esteem as did Catholics. They regarded him as a man of God, and would do almost anything for him. He made many converts. His power for the conversion of sinners was remarkable.

During his pastorate at St. Patrick's Father O'Brien practically lived in the saddle. In this way he went from house to house on his errands of spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Everyone in the country around knew him and his white horse as far as they could be seen. Everyone looked on his brief visits as a blessing from heaven. He took a special interest in children; and he left nothing undone in order to instruct them in their religion and train them in its practices. They loved him as a father.

In Father OBrien it was not the natural man, but the supernatural man that won his way to the hearts of people of every age, creed and station. There was little in the natural man, except his charity, that would excite esteem or admiration. His ungainly dress and appearance would make a stranger take him for the most ordinary of men. But as a priest of God he drew all to himself.

More than seventy years have passed since he ceased to be pastor of St. Patrick's; yet Father O'Brien's name still stands for all

that is good, holy and zealous in a minister of souls. His memory has never ceased to be held in benediction. Many believed he was endowed with supernatural powers. In spite of his awkward bearing, a somewhat harsh voice, and the fact that he spoke with a lisp, one could not imagine a more effective preacher. The earnestness of the orator made the audience forget all these drawbacks. He used the language of the people, that they might the better understand. His words burned themselves on the soul, so to express it, and made an impression that did not fade away.

Very truly yours,

John J. McGreevy.

One would search the United States in vain for Catholics truer and stauncher in their religion than are those of Perry County, Ohio. They may not be wealthy in the possessions of this world; but they abound in greater riches, those of the faith. As in other parts of the country, so in Perry County many Catholics from the rural districts, some years back, joined in the march for the west that they might better their temporal fortunes on the more fertile soil of the great prairies, or in the rising towns of the new settlements.

Still, Catholicity has not declined at this cradle of the Church in Ohio. Some of the old houses of divine worship have been abandoned, it is true; but this has been done that they might be replaced by better and larger churches built to meet the exigencies of the changes that have come with time. [29]

Wherever they went, those who moved away from this

[29] This westward movement was perfectly natural and harmless. It was despite the clergy of Perry County, whether diocesan or regular, and not in any wise due to negligence on their part. From this it will be seen how uncalled-for, and without point, is the rather censorious letter that appeared in the "Open Forum" of the *Catholic Columbian*, August 27, 1920.

early colony carried their religion with them. As a rule, they remained notably true to it. Doubtless their fidelity to the faith is in no small measure due to the patient, thorough care with which Father O'Brien instilled it into their hearts, or into the hearts of their parents. They carried his memory along with them, and bequeathed it to their children, by whom it is still cherished. In Perry County itself, he is so intimately connected with the history of the Church there, his name will not easily be forgotten by Catholics. As the Rev. Dennis J. Dunne, the present pastor of Saint Patrick's, writes under date of December 18, 1922:

Three quarters of a century have ebbed away over time's fleeting tide since the illustrious Dominican, Rev. M. A. O'Brien, erected St. Patrick's Church, near Junction City, Ohio, and served as its pastor. In the protracted period of years many priests have ministered at its altar, but of all who have come and gone it seems that Father O'Brien has left the most lasting impression upon those among whom he lived and labored. His memory is not suffered to die, but is cherished as an heirloom by each succeeding generation.

The few survivors who have had the pleasure of knowing him are unanimous in stating that he displayed, with unaffected simplicity, the most striking virtues that can adorn the true follower of Christ. Sincere and zealous in his profession, humane and generous in his disposition, he was himself a pattern of the character he represented, the ambassador of God to man. Of all the noble traits of his priestly character there is one which is well remembered, namely his zeal for the faith. In season and out of season his constant endeavor was "to reclaim the lost child to virtue." To recall erring souls to the paths of penance he was accustomed to open the Gospel door of God's mercy by administering the sacrament of confession even by the wayside.

Whatever eloquence he possessed, his sermons were so full of piety and unction that they made his audiences everywhere happier and better men. By example more than by word he inculcated

Christianity's grandest virtues, the practice of charity, patience in suffering, and reliance on the providence of God. That these virtues are conspicuous in the community to-day may be largely ascribed to the apostolic zeal of the apostolic Dominican who labored so well to foster and propagate them.

Shakespeare said: "The evil that men do lives after them. The good is oft interred with their bones." Strangely in contrast with this assertion lives the memory of Father O'Brien. Tradition in this locality, where he was known so well by people within and without the fold, has nothing of evil but everything of good to tell of him to posterity. As they look back into the distant past he lives in their memory.

Here Father Dunne likens the whilom shepherd of Saint Patrick's to the pastor in Goldsmith's *Deserted Village,* of whom we read:

> At church, with meek and unaffected grace,
> His looks adorn'd the venerable place;
> Truth from his lips prevail'd with double sway,
> And fools who came to scoff remain'd to pray.
> The service past, around the pious man,
> With ready zeal each honest rustic ran;
> E'en children follow'd, with endearing wile,
> And pluck'd his gown, to share the good man's smile.
> His ready smile a parent's warmth express'd,
> Their welfare pleased him, and their cares distress'd;
> To them his heart, his love, his griefs were given,
> But all his serious thoughts had rest in heaven.
> As some tall cliff that lifts its awful form,
> Swells from the vale, and midway leaves the storm,
> Though round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,
> Eternal sunshine settles on its head.

CHAPTER X

JOURNEY ABROAD, PROVINCIAL

"During the next eight years he performed more hard missionary labor than many a hard-working priest has done in a lifetime." So tells us the *Catholic Advocate*, speaking of the period of Father O'Brien's life recounted in the last two chapters.[1] Nor are the *Advocate's* words of praise any exaggeration.

The tireless Friar Preacher gave himself no rest. Not content with his own toil, he often volunteered to take that which belonged to others.[2] Everyone marvelled that his constitution did not give way under the strain; for, though wiry, he had never been robust. Eventually he was threatened with such a catastrophe.

For this reason, Father Charles D. Bowling, then acting as vicar provincial in the absence of Father

[1] Edition of February 4, 1871. Article by Rev. A. V. Higgins, O.P.

[2] Father O'Brien likely did this extra work in part as an assistance to the priests who taught in the novitiate, and in part because some of them were foreigners, and had not become proficient in English. Fathers Eugene Pozzo and Mannes D'Arco were Italians, while Fathers Francis S. Vilarrasa and Francis Cubero (the latter of whom spent his time between Saint Joseph's and Zanesville) were Spaniards. Father Joseph S. Alemany (provincial from 1848 to 1850) was also a Spaniard, and Father Aloysius Orengo, a missionary in Tennessee, was an Italian. Accustomed to the sunlight in their native countries, those of these foreign priests who were at Saint Joseph's used their influence to have many of the trees in the convent yard felled. This circumstance caused them long to be jocularly referred to as the "Spanish invasion." Perhaps no priest ever in the province has left a happier memory than is that bequeathed to it by Father Vilarrasa.

Joseph S. Alemany, ordered the pastor of Saint Patrick's Parish to take a vacation.[3] It was perhaps to be the first he had had since his entrance into the Order. He had not seen his people or his native land from the time of his departure for America, in May, 1826. A sea voyage and a sojourn in Ireland, therefore, were selected as the surest means of giving Father O'Brien a much-needed rest, and also as the best reward for his faithful services.

The contributor to the *Catholic Advocate* tells us again, that the over-worked hunter of souls started on his journey for Ireland in the spring of 1850.[4] But the missionary's presence in Boston (where he had gone in search of help to build a college at Saint Joseph's), early in June of that year, indicates that he did not leave America until at a date later than that which is designated by this journal.[5]

Be this as it may, we find Father O'Brien in his native county of Tipperary shortly after midsummer, 1850. Neither any incident connected with his homeward voyage, nor how long it took, have we been able to ascertain. Yet one may fancy that no favor within the power of his superiors could have afforded our ambassador of Christ greater pleasure than this visit with those who were dear to him. Pious though he was, and detached from the things of the world, he retained a deep love for his people and great affection for the land of his birth.

[3] Father Alemany had left for Europe in order to attend a general chapter. It then fell to Father Bowling, as prior of the convent in which the next provincial chapter should be held, to act as provincial during Alemany's absence.

[4] See note 1.

[5] "Memoranda of the Diocese of Boston," IV, 18 (Diocesan Archives of Boston).

Still, we may rest assured, the apostle's eagerness to be back at work for the salvation of souls did not suffer him to tarry around his old home any longer than he thought necessary for the restoration of his health. While his natural attachments were great, his zeal was greater.

Another circumstance that likely shortened the Dominican's vacation was the fact that his parents were now dead. The *Nenagh News,* in fact, indicates that the only members of the large family still living in Ireland were a brother and a sister. [6]

It was our Friar Preacher's custom, whenever he went into a strange diocese, to pay his respects to the bishop at once and obtain the diocesan faculties, that he might miss no occasion of helping any unfortunate he should chance upon. Never, we are told, did an ordinary withhold the powers which Father O'Brien sought. Rarely, if ever, were they not granted him for life. There was something in the man that drew one's confidence—indeed, made his requests irresistible.

This same zeal accompanied the missionary on his vacation in Ireland. Thus, on his arrival at home, he lost no time in securing faculties for the Diocese of Killaloe, in which his people lived, either from the Right Rev. Patrick Kennedy, or from the vicar general, Very Rev. Ambrose O'Connor, who was then rector of the church at Nenagh. Nor did our son of Saint Dominic hesitate to make good use of the power thus given him. In one instance, at least, it enabled him to reconcile to God a man who had been notably negligent in his religious duties.

[6] Edition of February 1, 1913. Several members of the family seem to have come to the United States.

The report of Father O'Brien's zeal and extraordinary faculty for reforming the wayward and sinful had reached even remote Tipperary. Thus some of his friends resolved to take advantage of his presence at Nenagh for the spiritual betterment of one who had become all too remiss in the interests of his soul. The story, as told in the *Nenagh News,* runs thus:

> Father O'Brien always cherished a strong love for his native land. In 1850 he paid a visit to Ireland. He spent the greater part of his time at Nenagh with his brother Daniel. He frequently visited his sister, Mrs. Burke, of Bawn. Some one gave him a hint that the car-driver who used to drive him out to Bawn was not as punctual in his religious duties as he might be. Next time they drove out, the good priest asked in the blandest manner the usual question: "My child, how long is it since you were at your duty?"
>
> The driver pretended not to hear him, and remarked: "Father O'Brien, does not Keeper Hill look fine this morning?" "It does, my child [was the missionary's reply], but we will talk about Keeper when you answer my question." [Thus cornered, the driver of the jaunting-car said:] "Well, Father, I'm ashamed to tell you." [Then came the gentle priest's pet phrase for such occasions:] "My child, this is the best time [in the world] for you to make your confession." The Father soon had on his stole, and the story of the car-driver was soon told.[7]

The writer in the *News* does not tell us; yet we may believe that this indifferent driver of the jaunting-car, in which the Friar Preacher rode back and forth between Bawn and Nenagh, led a better life thereafter. This story is but one of a thousand such that we have heard in connection with the missioner's apostolic activities. In practically every instance, so it was stated, the way-

[7] *Ibid.* Keeper Hill, it will be remembered, was a bold mountain dome some ten miles southwest of Nenagh.

ward Catholic was happy and much the better for the encounter.

Still another result of this journey abroad, as we learn from Sister Mary Josephine Meagher, O.S.D., an aged member of Sacred Heart Academy, Springfield, Illinois, was the conversion of our traveller's own brother. Daniel O'Brien had not practised his religion from the time of his marriage with a non-Catholic lady. To all the family, and especially to the pious Dominican, this had long been a source of keen sorrow.

Brought under the spell of his priestly brother's influence at this time, Daniel not only came back into the Church, but ever afterwards led an exemplary life. The reader needs not be told that the change on the part of his near kinsman gave Father O'Brien great consolation. Probably, indeed, the hope of effecting this conversion was one of the things uppermost in his mind on the way to his native land. For years it had been the object of his most fervent prayers.

Doubtless owing to the long lapse of time, the contributor of the *Nenagh News* gives no further account of Father O'Brien's visit to his beloved Tipperary. This is the more unfortunate, because it was the last time the missionary saw Ireland. However, we know that he took advantage of the occasion to enlist interest in the American province of Dominican Fathers, which resulted in the vocation of four useful members from among his own kindred.[8] Other relatives became Dominican Sisters at Saint Catherine's, in Kentucky.

[8] These fathers were Rev. Matthew F. McGrath, a nephew of the subject of this biography, and Revs. Denis A. O'Brien, Denis J. Meagher and James R. Meagher, cousins of the same. Denis Meagher later became provincial. Other relatives came to the novitiate, but found that it was not their vocation to be Dominicans.

His health restored, and his visit over, Father O'Brien began his return journey. This, it would seem, must have been about the middle of September, 1850. Nor is it any stretch of fancy to suppose that on board the ship, both from and back to America, the hunter of souls spent much of his time with the ship's crew, seeking out the Catholics among them, hearing their confessions, and exhorting them to be faithful to their religion. He always indulged in such pious work when travelling by water.

But now there had occurred a change in the administration of the affairs of the province, of which, owing to his absence, our wayfarer was probably totally unaware. The event was to bring him an honor equally unsought, unexpected and undesired.

In the previous March Father Joseph S. Alemany, then provincial, accompanied by Father Francis Sadoc Vilarrasa, started for Europe. Their objective was a general chapter of the Order that was to be convened at Naples, about the middle of May, 1850, for the election of a new Master General. On reaching Rome, however, they found that the chapter had been called off by Pius IX, who had determined to place Father Alexander Vincent Jandel at the head of the Order.[9]

In the preceding year (1849), the same Pontiff had preconized Father Charles Pius Montgomery, pastor of Saint Thomas' Church, Zanesville, Ohio, and formerly provincial, the first bishop of Monterey, California; but the humble priest declined the appointment. Scarcely

[9] Rev. Joseph S. Alemany, Buffalo, New York, to Archbishop Purcell, Cincinnati, March 31, 1850 (Diocesan Archives of Cincinnati); Mortier *Histoire des Maîtres Généraux de l'Ordre des Frères Prêcheurs*, VII, 488-489; Foisset, *Vie du R.P. Lacordaire*, II, 321.

had Father Alemany arrived in the Eternal City, when he seems to have attracted the attention of the papal court. The Ninth Pius now selected him for the vacant episcopal see on the Pacific Coast.

Father Alemany was consecrated bishop of Monterey, in Rome, on June 30, 1850. Thus the Province of Saint Joseph was left without a provincial, which necessitated the election of a successor to Dr. Alemany at the chapter to be held in the next fall. Of all this, there can be little doubt, Father O'Brien knew nothing until his arrival in New York, about the middle of October. There he likely met his friends, the new prelate of Monterey and Father Vilarrasa, and learned from them the facts we have just laid before the reader.[10]

From New York the apostolic priest hurried on to Perry County, Ohio. He was anxious to be again with his beloved people of Saint Patrick's Parish. Perhaps also, he felt that his services might be needed for the erection of the college at Saint Joseph's and the new churches referred to in the previous chapter. Father O'Brien, it is said, reached the end of his journey the last day or so in October. He records a baptism at Saint Patrick's on the first of November.

In the meantime, a provincial chapter had been convened at Saint Rose's, in Kentucky, for the purpose of electing a provincial to succeed Bishop Alemany. No particular priest appears to have stood out more prominently than another as a candidate for the office. Evidently, however, Father O'Brien's character, zeal

[10] Bishop Alemany and Father Vilarrasa arrived in New York on October 12, 1850, and sailed for the Isthmus of Panama on the 28th of the same month. See the New York *Freeman's Journal*, October 19, and November 2, 1850.

and executive ability had attracted the attention of those upon whom it now devolved to choose a head for the province.

Yet, strange to say, they do not seem to have thought of him for the position. By no one was his name so much as mentioned in that connection. They voted for the missionary on the first ballot merely with a view of waiting to ascertain the prevailing trend of thought in regard to the various candidates. To the surprise of all when the suffrages were counted, Father O'Brien was found to have been unanimously elected.

It is worthy of notice that this was the first of the only two instances in the history of the province in which a provincial has been chosen who was not one of the elective assembly, and the only case of a unanimous election to the office.[11] This singular event took place on October 30, 1850. There were not wanting those who felt that the choice of Father O'Brien, under the circumstances, was in a special way the work of the Holy Ghost. Even to this day it is spoken of as an example of divine inspiration. Nor can it be denied that the occurrence cannot be so well explained on other grounds.

No one could have been more surprised at Father O'Brien's election to the office of provincial than was the missionary himself. It has been said that, when the news reached him in Ohio, he could hardly believe it, and was inclined to treat the report as a joke. But when finally convinced that he had really been chosen for the

[11] Father John A. Rochford, then in New York, was elected provincial by the chapter held at Saint Joseph's, in Ohio, in October, 1873. The chapters that elect a provincial are composed of the Masters in Theology and Preachers General belonging to the province, ex-provincials, the actual priors and one delegate from each convent chosen on ballot by the fathers of the community.

post of trust and honor, the humble man accepted it as the will of heaven, and took up its duties with his wonted earnestness. [12]

This dignity made no change in the life of the man of God other than to quicken his sense of responsibility. It spurred him on to greater efforts in behalf of religion rather than caused him to lessen his labors.

No one could be more thoughtful of others than was Rev. M. A. O'Brien, whatever their station in life. His regard for the authority of others seemed almost a religion with him. When, therefore, he had taken a survey of his new field of labor, he wrote to Archbishop Purcell, who was then travelling in Europe, and gradually making his way to Rome, whither he had been called to receive the pallium: [13]

Somerset, Perry Co., Ohio,
January 17th, 1851.

Right Rev. Father:—

As it has pleased the Almighty to place on me the fulfillment of the duties of Provincial of this province, I deem it my duty to write a few lines to you, acquainting you with the same; and also to inform you that I am ever willing and desirous of receiving advice and admonition from you, in as far as regards the spiritual direction of the souls placed under our charge. This duty of mine to you would have been sooner attended to; but I wished first to see everything settled as far as I could.

Thank God, all goes on well. Our school at St. Joseph's has been in operation since the first week of December, and will continue. [14]

[12] At that time, by dispensation, the newly elected provincial assumed office at once, and did not have to wait until his confirmation came from the Master General.

[13] See *Archbishop Purcell and the Archdiocese of Cincinnati*, by Sister Mary Agnes McCann, p. 57. This distinguished prelate was made an archbishop, July 19, 1850.

[14] This evidently refers to opening the old convent for college purposes, for it seems quite certain that the basement of the church was in use as a school the year before.

Father Daly attends to the school in person, and it is well attended. Many Protestants send not [their children] any more to the public school, but to the Catholic Church school. In the course of a month or two, we will (God willing) be prepared for boarders.

The affairs of the McCluny church are going on pretty well. The church was opened on Christmas morning, completed with the exception of the plastering. I have also endeavored to settle everything about the South Fork and Lexington [missions]. They are attended regularly. I have refunded to them the price of the horse which was spoken of—which I thought was right to be done.

I would be pleased to hear from you. And anything you suggest or advise, as far as is in my power, shall be done, with the blessing of God, for the prosperity and advancement of our holy religion and the salvation of souls, which is the sublime duty we are all devoted to.

Wishing you a pleasant and happy sojourn in the holy city, and a speedy return to your own loving children in Christ, at the same time begging your blessing.

Believe me
your humble servant in Christ,
M. A. O'Brien, O.P.,
Provincial of St. Joseph's Province.

Most Rev. J. B. Purcell, D.D.,
Archbishop of Cincinnati,
Rome.[15]

In the Order of Saint Dominic no house of a province is designated for its provincial's residence. The law leaves him free to choose whatever convent he prefers for his official domicile. Likely because it was there that he had entered the Order and realized his long-cherished dream of becoming a priest, Father O'Brien loved Saint Rose's, in Kentucky, in an especial manner. At Saint

[15] Diocesan archives of Cincinnati. Many non-Catholics also sent their daughters to the academy of the Dominican Sisters in Somerset, in which Father O'Brien took a keen interest.

Rose's, therefore, he now made his home. But, owing to his many missionary labors and the various duties incumbent upon the office he filled, this cradle of the Order in the United States saw little of the indefatigable chief superior during the four years of his provincialship.

The founders of Saint Joseph's Province of Dominicans had begun their work with the erection of a college, thus bequeathing to their successors an interest in Catholic education.[16] This was the College of Saint Thomas of Aquin attached to Saint Rose's Priory, in Kentucky. The suppression of this institution by Father Raphael Muños, in 1828, was regretted by all. Thus from that date a desire for another similar educational establishment, either in Kentucky or in Ohio, had been general through the province.

Prior to Father O'Brien's election, in fact, as a step towards the fulfillment of this wish, a day college for the boys of the neighborhood had been started in the basement of the new church at Saint Joseph's, near Somerset. Changes were also under way in the old convent, which it was intended to devote to such work until another structure could be built for the purpose.

The new provincial was deeply imbued with this spirit and tradition; whilst, possibly as a result of his early struggles to attain the priesthood, he took a keen interest in the subject of Catholic education in general. A man of action, he inaugurated his provincialate by the erection of a splendid college building at Saint Joseph's, in Ohio. Meanwhile, the old convent was used for the education of young men and boys as well from a distance as from the neighborhood.

[16] They had also intended to start a college in Cincinnati and in Canton, Ohio.

Saint Joseph's College flourished from the start. Students came from far and near. Before the close of Father O'Brien's term of office the school enjoyed an excellent standing in educational circles. It had a splendid curriculum for the time. No similar institution in the country could boast of a more creditable journal conducted by its pupils than *The Collegian* which was edited by the boys of Saint Joseph's. The school's debating, reading and historical societies gained a high reputation. [17]

The new provincial's activities along these lines, however, were not limited to Ohio. In 1849, the College of Saint Dominic which had been started by the venerable Father Samuel C. Mazzuchelli at Sinsinawa, Wisconsin, four years earlier, became affiliated to Saint Joseph's Province. Father O'Brien was strongly attached to his zealous Milanese confrère, took a keen interest in the establishment which he had founded, and left nothing undone in its behalf. Its work was not less efficient than was that at Saint Joseph's, nor its future less promising. [18]

Nor was this all. Father O'Brien believed that the College of Saint Thomas of Aquin, in Kentucky, should never have been closed. Accordingly, he used his authority as provincial in an effort to resurrect that institution.

[17] As most of the students at this college were from the south, it had to be suspended during the Civil War. After the war was over, Rev. William D. O'Carroll, who was now provincial, though he belonged to the Irish Province, refused to permit it to be resumed. The fathers then became engaged in other work. Thus the college was never resuscitated.

[18] This college struggled on through the Civil War, and was getting nicely on its feet again. But Father O'Carroll closed it, and sold the place to the Dominican Sisters.

SAINT JOSEPH'S COLLEGE AND CONVENT BUILT BY FATHER O'BRIEN
CONVENT AT SIDE OF CHURCH.

This was one of the few official acts of the apostolic superior—perhaps the only one—that failed to meet with a hearty co-operation on the part of his brethren. They felt, and possibly not without reason, that the presence of two other colleges in the immediate vicinity deprived Saint Thomas' of a sufficient *raison d'être,* even if they should not render abortive any attempt to re-establish it. They believed, too, that the educational establishments in Ohio and Wisconsin were all the province, with its few priests, could well manage.

With Father O'Brien, however, starting the Kentucky college was a matter of love and devotion to sacred memories. So start it he did, in spite of these handicaps. The resuscitated school, it is true, did not accomplish great things. Yet, under his influence and impulse, it prospered fairly well until its suspension at the outbreak of the Civil War, and did much good, especially for the young men of the neighborhood. [19]

Our provincial sought in every way to encourage Christian education. For this purpose, although he usually endeavored to avoid crowds, except in church, he scrupulously attended the old-time public examinations and exhibitions at the close of the school year. The academies of Saint Mary's, Somerset, Ohio, and Saint Catherine's, near Springfield, Kentucky, found in him a no less valuable than sympathetic friend.

At Saint Thomas', Zanesville, Ohio, the priests had long contended with the difficulty of conducting a parish school with lay teachers. Now Father O'Brien induced the Dominican Sisters to come to the aid of their

[19] The writer knew a number of men who were educated at this college. One of its former pupils has given us a splendid appreciation of Father O'Brien.

brethren. Thus, in the spring of 1853, work began on a brick building. The edifice, three stories high, was made ready for use by September of the same year.[20] It stood on the west side of Fifth Street, across from the church, and was for many years considered one of the best constructed and best lighted schools in the City of Zanesville. The fact that it remained in use for educational purposes until 1921 shows how well it stood the test of time.

The sisters lived on the third floor of this structure until the completion of their select academy, long known as Saint Columba's. It was contiguous to and begun almost simultaneously with the school. No doubt, it was also an inspiration of Father O'Brien. Not a few of Zanesville's cultured women, non-Catholic as well as Catholic, were educated within the hallowed walls of Saint Columba's. This building still serves as a home for the sisters who teach in the parochial school, but it is no longer used as an educational institution.

Works of a spiritual character went apace with the provincial's efforts in behalf of Christian education. Scarcely were the reins of authority placed in his hands, when he spurred up the work on a brick structure under way to replace the frame Saint Louis Bertrand's, in Clayton Township, Perry County, Ohio, that had become too small for the congregation of Rehoboth.

The new house of prayer, erected in a more central

[20] Notes from conversations with the late Sisters Mary Pius Nicholas and Catherine Brown; *Diocese of Columbus, The History of Fifty Years,* pp. 264-265. Sister Mary Pius was one of the first sisters sent to this school. Sister Catherine became one of its staff in the second or third year of its existence. Prior to the fall of 1853, the children of the parish had been taught, first, in the basement of the church, and then in houses rented for the purpose.

SAINT DOMINIC'S CHURCH, McCLUNY, OHIO.

SAINT PIUS' CHURCH ON SOUTH FORK CREEK, OHIO.

ST. ALBERT'S COLLEGE LIBRARY

location, was opened for the people, though not yet completed, on Christmas Day, 1850. It was dedicated to Saint Dominic, but became known as the McCluny church from the nearest hamlet. Many long regarded it as one of the prettiest churches in that part of Ohio.[21]

Saint Dominic's was no more than finished, when the ever watchful superior began preparations for a temple of divine worship on South Fork Creek, in Pleasant Township, for the people of that adjoining mission. The South Fork church, as it was called, he had built of hand-made brick, and placed under the patronage of Saint Pius V. It was also a pretty and neat country fane.[22] Although not quite completed during Father O'Brien's provincialship, Saint Pius' owed its inspiration largely to him. So did he start it on its way.

The congregation of Saint Rose, in Kentucky, had likewise outgrown the original church built by Bishop Fenwick and Father Samuel T. Wilson. Thus the needs of these good people also claimed the Friar Preacher's attention. This was the place which, as the reader will remember, Father O'Brien loved above all others. The construction of the new Saint Rose's Church, therefore, he would superintend himself. So, too, would he make it a temple worthy as well of this cherished mother institution as of America's first flower of sanctity.[23] It should be of cut stone.

Saint Rose's rather grandiose style—that is, for the time and place—greatly increased its cost. Money was scarce. As well missionary labors as duties connected

[21] *Diocese of Columbus* as in preceding note, p. 491.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 494.
[23] The church is dedicated to Saint Rose of Lima, America's first canonized saint.

with his office necessitated long and frequent absences on the part of the modern apostle. In this way, the construction of the graceful Gothic edifice was drawn out for some years after he had completed his provincialate. However, as a future chapter will recount, God gave his worthy servant the consolation of finishing it himself.

Eight years before Father O'Brien's election as provincial a beautiful stone Gothic church had been built in Zanesville, Ohio. Although in use, owing to its cost and the scarcity of money, the interior of the sacred edifice could not be completed until about the time of this event. Now, however, thanks to the exertions of both clergy and people, it was not only finished but also decorated and out of debt. To commemorate the happy consummation, Saint Thomas' was consecrated on December 14, 1851, being the first church of the province to receive this honor.

Archbishop Purcell performed the beautiful and interesting ceremony. The Right Rev. Martin J. Spalding, of Louisville, Kentucky, was asked to preach for the occasion, but ill health obliged him to decline the invitation. Rev. William S. Murphy, provincial of the Missouri Province of Jesuits, then took the place of Louisville's ordinary, and charmed the people of Zanesville with an eloquent sermon. In spite of the extremely cold weather, great crowds attended the consecration of what was then the city's finest temple of divine worship. [24]

[24] Bishop Spalding, Louisville, November 27, 1851, to Archbishop Purcell, Cincinnati (Notre Dame Archives); Archbishop Purcell, Cincinnati, December 8, 1851, to Bishop Spalding, Louisville (Louisville Archives); the *Catholic Telegraph*, December 13 and 27, 1851. The first issue of the *Telegraph* says that the church will be consecrated, and the second calls the ceremony a solemn dedication; but it evidently means a consecration.

The provincial now conceived the idea of having the Zanesville house erected into a convent. There were then only two such institutions in the part of the Order under his jurisdiction, Saint Joseph's, in Ohio, and Saint Rose's, in Kentucky, albeit the law requires three convents for the establishment of a province. The American province had been founded with one by a very special dispensation.

Thus Father O'Brien's purpose in the change of the status of Saint Thomas', Zanesville, was to increase the number of formal convents in the province in the interest of its better government and organization in accordance with the spirit of the Order. Yet, although no law required this sanction, he would not put such a design into execution without the consent of his ordinary. He therefore wrote Archbishop Purcell:

St. Joseph's Convent,
December 21st, 1852.

Most Rev. Father:—

When I had the pleasure of seeing you in Cincinnati, we were speaking of Zanesville. I mentioned that it was intended, with the sanction of the Most Rev. [Master] General, to establish the house in Zanesville as a Convent. It will make no change in the attendance of the place, the only object being a better organization. . . . I forgot to ask your formal sanction for this step. This I now humbly beg of you to grant; and I feel convinced it will tend much to the advancement of holy religion, etc.

Father Francis Cubero, in a note in the marriage records of Saint Thomas', tells us that this church was consecrated in 1844. However, he certainly wrote his remarks some years after the event, and made an error in the date. Likely he confused the year of dedication with that of the consecration.

Begging your paternal benediction and prayers,
I remain
yours obediently in Christ,
M. A. O'Brien, O.S.D.,
Provincial of St. Joseph's Province.
Most Rev. J. B. Purcell, D.D.,
Archbishop of Cincinnati. [25]

The pious plan of making Saint Thomas', Zanesville, a convent did not crystallize, and that house still remains what is known in the Order of Saint Dominic as a vicariate. The cause of the failure, so at least tradition tells us, was the objection of Archbishop Purcell. Despite Father O'Brien's assurance to the contrary, the zealous metropolitan feared lest the conventual observances would take so much of the priests' time that they would not be able properly to attend the missions under their charge.

Accordingly, the humble superior took no further steps in the matter, although he had the permission of the Master General of the Order to proceed with the affair, and was convinced that such a measure would materially advance the cause of religion. No one could have been more thoroughly imbued than was he with the idea that the vocation of the Friars Preacher is to subserve the hierarchy in the work of saving souls. Some have thought that he carried this sacrosanct spirit even to excess.

Prior to this, and with the same end in view, he had sought and obtained permission from the Master General to make a priory of the Vicariate of Saint Peter, Memphis, Tennessee. [26] This house had been conferred

[25] Cincinnati Diocesan Archives.
[26] The Most Rev. A. V. Jandel, Rome, October 8, 1852, to Father O'Brien, Saint Rose's, in Kentucky (Archives of Saint Joseph's Priory).

upon the Order by Bishop Miles, a friend of Father O'Brien, some years before, and had become the center of considerable missionary activity in the south. The provincial felt that its promotion to the dignity of a convent would be not only a further step towards rounding out the number of such institutions in the province, but also an aid to its apostolic work.

For some reason unknown to the writer, this project, like that in regard to Saint Thomas', Zanesville, was never put into execution. Yet both are illustrations of our Friar Preacher's breadth of view and zeal for the advancement of religion. Nor was there ever a successful man who did not meet with some failures.

The provincial's missionary spirit caused him to seek ever broader fields of apostolic activity for his Order. He therefore endeavored to obtain additional forces from abroad. The fathers who should be thus obtained he would employ principally, at least until they should be prepared for other work, in teaching and in keeping up the monastic life of the institute.[27] This would leave those versed in the language and ways of the country freer for a more vigorous prosecution of an active life in the interest of souls. In this also did the zealous harvester of Christ meet with disappointment, for the Order's Master General could not then afford him the help which he so ardently desired.

One of the outstanding features of Father O'Brien's term of office as provincial is the church and convent of Saint Dominic, Washington City.

The Friars Preacher were no strangers in the Arch-

[27] Jandel to O'Brien as in preceding note; Rev. Robert A. White, Rome, October 9, 1852, to Father O'Brien, Saint Rose's, in Kentucky (Archives of Saint Joseph's Priory).

diocese of Baltimore. Father Francis Bodkin, of the Irish Province, had labored at Hagerstown, Maryland, and on the adjacent missions in 1795 and 1796. "Good Father John" C. Fenwick, the first English-speaking American who entered the Order of Saint Dominic, and an uncle of Cincinnati's proto-prelate, toiled in the southern part of the same state from about the year 1800 until his death in Charles County, August 20, 1815. He was a native of Maryland, and left a wholesome memory that still exists. [28]

Bishop Edward Fenwick, also a native of Lord Baltimore's former colony, acted as pastor at Piscataway, Prince George's County, in 1805 and 1806. He retained the diocesan faculties until his death, in 1832, and always exercised them for the benefit of Catholics on his journeys to the state. Father Robert A. Angier was a missionary in Prince George's and Charles counties from late 1804 until the fall of 1807, and again from 1816 to 1825. These two Friars Preacher, by their priestly zeal and deportment, won the hearts alike of the ordinary, the clergy and the people. [29]

Fathers Nicholas D. Young, Nicholas R. Young (a nephew of the former) and John A. Bokel came to the Order from the Archdiocese of Baltimore, and did service there on occasions of visits with their families. The founders of Saint Joseph's Province, in fact, had first intended to begin their work in Maryland. But the crying needs of Kentucky's pioneer Church induced

[28] O'Daniel, *Right Rev. Edward D. Fenwick, passim; American Catholic Historical Review*, April, 1915; and *Historical Souvenir of Saint Dominic's Church, Washington, D. C.*, pp. 9-10.

[29] *Life of Bishop Fenwick* and *History of Saint Dominic's Church* as in preceding note.

Archbishop Carroll to request them to cast their lot in the new western country. They did so in a spirit of sacrifice and religious obedience. [30]

Thus the Dominicans became anchored, so to express it, on the eastern slope of the Mississippi Valley. Nor was it until Father O'Brien's provincialship that they secured a permanent holding on this side of the Alleghany Mountains, Saint Dominic's, in the National Capital. Often has the writer heard the late venerable Cardinal Gibbons say that he regarded the Convent of Saint Dominic and the Dominican House of Studies, at the Catholic University, as a fulfillment of the Scriptural promise: "Cast thy bread upon the running waters; for after a long time thou shalt find it again" (*Ecclesiastes* XI, 1).

Saint Dominic's owes its existence to the good-will of the Most Rev. Francis P. Kenrick, the sixth metropolitan of our oldest American archbishopric. In the early years of his priestly life in Kentucky, that scholarly prelate learned to love and admire the Friars Preacher for the spirit of zeal and self-sacrifice which they manifested in the pioneer days of the western Church. He had also known Father O'Brien as a member of the Teaching Brothers of Bardstown.

When, therefore, Doctor Kenrick was transferred from the Diocese of Philadelphia to the archiepiscopal See of Baltimore (August 19, 1851), he resolved to invite the Dominicans into his new jurisdiction. [31]

[30] *Life of Bishop Fenwick* as in note 28.

[31] It is tradition in the province that Archbishop Kenrick was wont to say that the giving of the place in Washington was in part a retribution for an injustice he feared he had done the early fathers in Kentucky. Fathers John A. Bokel, Sydney A. Clarkson, Jeremiah P. Turner, James V. Edelen and Constantine L. Egan, who were at Washington in the early

The archbishop chose Washington as the city in which he would tender the fathers a place. He made his generous offer early in 1852. Eagerly was it accepted by Father O'Brien, who rightly looked upon a house in the National Capital as an entering wedge for the province into the more populous east. For the organization of the proffered parish our superior selected an ex-provincial and a man of varied experience, Rev. George A. J. Wilson.

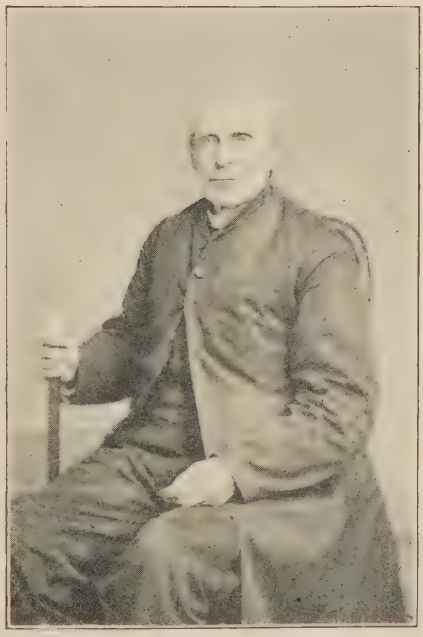
Father Wilson arrived in Washington towards the end of 1852, or early in 1853. The territory selected for the proposed congregation was then known as "The Island," because surrounded by the Potomac River, the "Eastern Branch" and an old canal that has since been filled in. It embraced nearly the entire southwestern portion of the city. The Catholics of the locality eagerly gathered around their pastor, for they were anxious to have a church nearer to their homes.

A spacious plot of ground, near the center of the district, was secured from Georgetown College. On this a temple of prayer soon began to rise. Father O'Brien's solicitude for the pious enterprise brought him to the National Capital more than once. Nor did his presence fail to win the people, and to quicken their eagerness.

The provincial watched the growth of the new church with an anxious eye. Although he could not attend its dedication, March 19, 1854, the event was a source of

days, all told the writer on several occasions that they had heard Doctor Kenrick make this statement. Later, the archbishop also asked the fathers to take a church in Baltimore; but the scarcity of subjects at the time, and the opposition of the Master General, made it impossible to accept the generous offer.

THE FIRST SAINT DOMINIC'S CHURCH, WASHINGTON, D. C.



FATHER O'BRIEN WHEN PROVINCIAL.

much joy to his heart. So was it a day of rejoicing for the Catholics in the sparsely settled southwestern section of Washington City, for they now had a house of divine worship within easy distance in which they could hear mass and the word of God. He had the church placed under the patronage of Saint Dominic. To this day it remains a favorite sanctuary for many pious Washingtonians. [32]

Father O'Brien's keen foresight has been realized. Saint Dominic's, in the District of Columbia, soon proved the beginning of the movement towards the east which he had hoped for. Not merely was it the first house of the province on this side of Ohio and Kentucky; its erection gave added zest to the fathers, as well as prepared the way for those well-known missionary and other apostolic labors which have accomplished much good for religion along the Atlantic seaboard.

Some weeks after the dedication of Saint Dominic's, the Right Rev. Martin J. Spalding proffered the Order a parish in the episcopal City of Louisville, Kentucky. Provincial O'Brien was grateful for the generous offer; but he feared lest the various employments of the priests and their small numbers should make it impossible to accept it. Accordingly, he wrote Doctor Spalding from Springfield, Kentucky:

St. Rose's Convent,
May 29th, 1854.

Right Rev. Bishop:—

When I last had the honor of seeing you, I promised that I would soon see you again in Louisville. But upon reconsideration I think that it would be more advisable for me to defer my visit

[32] *Souvenir History of Saint Dominic's* as in note 28.

until the arrival of Father Wilson from Washington. Should it be impossible for him to come, it will be entirely out of our power to accept your kind offer. However, I have every hope of his speedy arrival. So soon as he will come, we will both, God willing, visit Louisville.

The plasterers are busily engaged on our new church. And I hope we will enjoy the happiness of seeing you here next October to dedicate it.

Recommending myself and our community to your prayers,

I remain yours, Right Rev. Bishop, very respectfully,

M. A. O'Brien,
Provincial, O.S.D.

Right Rev. Bishop Spalding.[33]

The superior's fears were only too well grounded. The new church and house in the National Capital were heavily burdened with debt. Father George A. Wilson, for he had contracted it, begged that it should not be shifted on other shoulders. So now Father O'Brien, after consultation with his council, wrote again to Bishop Spalding:

St. Rose's Convent,
June 12th, 1854.

Right Rev. Bishop:—

I received a letter from the Rev. Father Wilson, of Washington, informing me that it would be impossible for him to leave that place on account of the heavy debt on his church. This was very unpleasant news to me, since he was the only person destined to erect the church in Louisville.

And besides, since it will be impossible for me to spare anyone else, I have consulted with some of the old Priests of the Province, and they advised me to defer proceeding any further in the matter of erecting a church in Louisville, until after the meeting of the fathers for the election of a new Provincial; which will take place

[33] Louisville Diocesan Archives.

next October. So, Right Rev. Bishop, your kind offer cannot, at present, be accepted. I hope, however, that at some future time we will have the honor of accepting your kind offer of having a branch of our Order in Louisville.

We are all well at St. Rose's.

Pray for me.

Yours very respectfully,
M. A. O'Brien,
Provincial, O.S.D.

Right Rev. Bishop Spalding. [34]

Father O'Brien did not permit these various activities to dull his interest in the most important houses of any religious order, the novitiates. Keenly did he realize that the convents of Saint Rose and Saint Joseph were the heart whence flowed the life-blood that kept the pulse of the province beating. Back and forth he journeyed between these two institutions, for he felt that if all were well there, all would surely go well with the rest of the province.

Ever on the lookout for vocations, the missionary now gave himself in an especial manner to this good work. Many came to the novitiates; but, owing to the hard lines necessitated by a dire poverty, many also returned to their homes. Still Father O'Brien managed to keep the two bases of supply fairly well filled during all the term of his provincialship. [35]

Nor did the American apostle confine his efforts to fostering vocations for the First Order of Saint Dominic. The Third Order of Conventual Sisters claimed perhaps as much of his attention in this regard

[34] *Ibid.*

[35] *Freeman's Journal,* February 4, 1871. It was pathetic, not many years ago, to hear the old fathers tell of the poverty and consequent hardships that prevailed in the earlier days.

as did his own brethren. The Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Sienna, near Springfield, Kentucky, and of Saint Mary's, Somerset (now Saint Mary's of the Springs, Columbus), Ohio, owed some of their most useful members to Father O'Brien's zest and skill in detecting vocations. No inconvenience deterred him that he might be of assistance to these religious women.

The provincial kept his promise to Archbishop Purcell, that he would do all in his power to aid the metropolitan in the care of souls. Thus, during his term of office, Father O'Brien took under the charge of the community of Saint Joseph's the remainder of Perry County. In this way, we now find Saint Francis' (Sunday Creek), Saint Peter's (Monday Creek), and the mission of Oakfield again attended by the Friars Preacher. Saint Barnabas', Deavertown, Morgan County, Saint John the Evangelist's, Chauncey, Athens County, and other places also returned to their old fealty.[36]

[36] *The Catholic Almanac and Laity's Directory*, from 1852 to 1855; church records of Saint Bernard's, Corning, Ohio.

These congregations seem to have been taken over only temporarily, and were not retained long after the expiration of Father O'Brien's provincialship. The church of Sunday Creek was later removed to Chapel Hill, and still later to Corning. That of Monday Creek was replaced by Saint Mary's, Shawnee. A proposed church at Oakfield, it seems, was never built; and the place is now in the parish of Moxahala, successor to South Fork. The Deavertown parish must now be a part of the congregation of the Atonement, Crooksville, which succeeded Saint Dominic's, McCluny. Chauncey today belongs to Saint Paul's, Athens.

The Dominicans sought for a long time to turn over their parishes in Perry County, with the exception of Saint Joseph's and Somerset, to the diocese, that they might concentrate their forces along lines more in accordance with the vocation of the Order. Archbishop Purcell, hard put for priests, objected to this step. In 1872, however, Father Thomas N. Burke, then visitor to the province, gained the consent of Bishop Rosecrans, the first ordinary of Columbus; and at the close of that year these congregations ceased to be served by the Friars Preacher.

Father O'Brien was devoid of all sense of fear or danger. This likely served him well in more than one effort to reconcile sinners with God. At the present period of his career it was of great service to him in helping to quell a disturbance that seriously threatened Somerset, Ohio, with a calamity.

On September 7, 1853, a travelling show, known as "Welch's Hippodrome," appeared in the town. It had been extensively advertised, and large numbers had gathered to witness the performance. Soon after the commencement of the evening exhibition an altercation arose in the tents between a spectator and an employee of the circus, which soon developed into a general row. Thence it spread outside, and grew in proportion until many of the citizens of the place and laborers occupied on a cut for a railroad through the town were arrayed in a pitched battle with the showmen.

The contest was waged intermittently all night. Early the next day, the "Hippodrome War," to use the name by which the combat has come down in history, broke out with renewed energy. Firearms, clubs, picks, stones and every conceivable sort of weapon were used by those engaged in the conflict. One man was killed and a number wounded, some seriously. Somerset was in a state of terror.

The subject of our narrative was on a visit at Saint Joseph's at the time. No sooner did he hear of the trouble that had arisen in Somerset than he hurried to town. Without hesitation he threw himself into the mêlée that had got beyond control of the civic officers. Although his very presence would doubtless have calmed an ordinary disturbance, under the tumultuous excite-

ment and angry passions on that occasion his life was in danger from moment to moment.

However, with no thought of self, the man of God went about the streets and into houses taking weapons of every kind from the belligerents, pleading for peace, allaying wrath, pouring oil upon the troubled waters. In the meanwhile, military aid was summoned from Zanesville. The guards of that city reached Somerset shortly before nightfall; but by the time of their arrival, largely through the exertions of Father O'Brien, the riot had been practically quelled, and quiet restored. He then remained at Holy Trinity Rectory, in town, until the showmen departed. [37]

Another incident which seems to belong to this period of the missionary's life illustrates his zeal and quickness of decision. He was engaged in reading his breviary while he walked back and forth on a path in front of Saint Joseph's Convent. A Mr. Bringardener, suddenly riding up to him, announced that his father had been crushed by a log, and was perhaps dead. The provincial at once instructed the messenger to seek another priest to bring the holy oils and the Blessed Sacrament. A good horseman himself, clothed as he was in his habit, he then leaped upon Bringardener's

[37] We have told this story, in brief, substantially as it has been recounted to us many times by eye-witnesses. The old Catholics of Somerset and neighborhood were wont to censure the version of the "Hippodrome War" given by Colborn's history of Perry County, page 32-36 (published in Graham's *History of Fairfield and Perry Counties, Ohio.* Part V), because it makes no mention of Father O'Brien. They declared that no account of the episode could be complete without a record of the part the missionary played in it. While on a late visit to Somerset, seven or eight aged men and women, who were children at the time and witnesses of the scene, again spoke to the writer about it, and again told of Father O'Brien's fearless, heroic exertions.

steed, albeit barebacked and bathed in a lather of perspiration from its previous journey. Away he went, his white robes flinging to the breezes, reached the home of the injured man, and heard his confession before death.

Provincial though he was, our Friar Preacher did not cease to be also the apostle. He left nothing undone in order to assist his friend, Bishop Miles, who was sorely pressed for want of priests in the Diocese of Nashville. Father O'Brien himself made more than one trip through Tennessee. He was in great demand for sermons and retreats, as parochial missions were then more generally called. He conducted religious exercises alike for the clergy and sisters.

Visitations of the province and the necessity of questing in behalf of the ecclesiastical structures he had under way constrained the apostolic man to take frequent and long journeys. All these, if at all possible, he turned into hunting tours for the salvation of souls, for he had almost universal diocesan faculties.[33] Everywhere he exercised over people the same mysterious influence that had hitherto characterized his active ministry. Of the good he accomplished in these travels the reader may form some idea, if it be remembered that they carried him from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico, and from Saint Louis to New England.

The following brief note in regard to a couple, likely discovered on a tour through Ohio, may serve as an indication of how the provincial kept his eyes and ears ever open for those who had gone astray. It is but a sample of innumerable similar cases he is said to hâve set right.

[33] Rev. H. F. Lilly's sermon at Father O'Brien's funeral.

From Somerset he writes to Archbishop Purcell:

St. Joseph's Convent,
January 13th, 1852.

Most Rev. Father:—

There is a person under my direction now, who, some years since, married out of the Church. The lady was never baptized. There is every prospect of both doing well for their souls hereafter. Will you be kind enough to *dispense with the impediment,* so that things may be made right?

Asking your blessing,

I remain
Yours very respectfully,
M. A. O'Brien, O.S.D.
Provincial of St. Joseph's Province. [89]

So he went on day after day, spending himself and being spent for the good of religion and for the salvation of souls. But we cannot find a more fitting close for this chapter on Father O'Brien's provincialship than the words of Rev. Arthur V. Higgins in the *Catholic Advocate.* They are words that struck a sympathetic chord in the heart of the province. Father Higgins first tells how the missionary was sent to his native land for a rest, in 1850; then he proceeds to say:

He returned to this country in the fall of the same year, just in time to assume the office of a provincial, to which he had been elected by his brethren on the 30th day of October, 1850, as successor to the Very Rev. J. S. Alemany, the present venerable archbishop of San Francisco. Never did any one bring to the discharge of that office greater tact and skill. He read human character by intuition, and was consequently able to make in all cases the assignation of the proper person to his proper post. The whole province

[89] Cincinnati Diocesan Archives.

felt an influx of new life and energy. The old spirit of the Order was rekindled in every breast. It beat in the heart and coursed in the veins of every member, from the highest to the lowest. His administration was, under every aspect, eminently successful, and though not without its parallel, it has never, in its general results, been surpassed. [40]

[40] The *Catholic Advocate*, February 4, 1871. See Chapter IX, p. 89, note 5.

CHAPTER XI

PRIOR AND PASTOR AT SAINT ROSE'S

Upon a hill which doth command
The fairest valley in the land,
With silver stream meandering thro',
And verdant hills to fringe the view;
Where growing grain delights the eye,
And flocks and herds are grazing nigh,
Abidest thou in calm repose,
St. Rose!

Why 'bidest thou in calm repose,
In might and majesty, St. Rose?
'Tis that thou hast a mission here
To every heart and conscience dear;
'Tis that thou hast a work to do
Such as is given unto few.
Thy work I know, and God, He knows,
St. Rose!

Thy mission here full well I know;
I've seen thee out in rain and snow;
Or hot, or cold, or night, or day,
I've met thee toiling on the way.
I know that thou wilt not faithless be,
When souls that suffer look to thee,
Where sorrow is, thy mercy goes,
St. Rose![1]

[1] The *Nelson Record*, Bardstown, Kentucky. The date of the *Record* is missing; but Doctor Ray, the author of the poem, says it appeared about 1904. The doctor himself touched up the poem for this biography.

So wrote Doctor William W. Ray, whose wide medical practice in the town of Springfield and through Washington County, Kentucky, brought him into close contact with the labors of the fathers belonging to this monastery. He knew its priests well. Although he is not a Catholic himself, the high regard in which the poet physician held their devoted lives inspired the foregoing eulogy, that he might make the zeal of the community and its spirit of self-sacrifice better known to his readers.

With picturesquely situated Saint Rose's the subject of our narrative was now to be more intimately connected than he had ever been before, his heart to become more enamored of the hallowed spot, and his labors inseparably associated with its history. For nearly seven consecutive years that convent was now to be his domicile and the center of his toil; its mission, as described by Doctor Ray, his mission.

The Friar Preacher's term of office as head of his province expired in October, 1854. At the chapter then held at Saint Joseph's, in Ohio, the assembled fathers chose as his successor Rev. James Whelan, later the second bishop of Nashville, Tennessee.

It was with a sense of relief that Father O'Brien laid down the reins of authority. Brief, however, was his freedom from the cares of responsibility. Almost immediately after the arrival from Rome of letters confirming the choice of a new provincial made by the chapter, the community of Saint Rose elected our missionary for their superior to replace the Rev. Joseph T. Ryan, whose priorship had just come to a close. It was a substitution of one apostolic man for another at the helm of govern-

ment to guide the destiny of this mother convent of the west. [2]

No selection for a prior could have been wiser. Father Whelan, therefore, hastened to confirm it. The same tact and skill which had characterized his rule in the higher position of provincial Father O'Brien brought to the discharge of his duties as superior at Saint Rose's and pastor of its parish and missions. His spirit was enkindled alike in the community and in the people. The affairs of the home parish, when at the convent, he directed himself. For the others and the distant missions, while he ever kept a watchful eye over them, he gave general instructions, leaving the management of them largely to the faithful assistants entrusted with their care.

Yet these also the prior visited from time to time, and took the place of the fathers under whose charge they were. One of his purposes in this was to set an example, for he would not think of imposing upon another that which he was not ready to do himself. A second reason was that the other priests might enjoy an occasional change and respite. Of himself Father O'Brien had no thought, except as regarded his soul. He never dreamt of rest as long as he could go. Still a third motive was his thirst for missionary labors and an ardent desire to do good in any and every possible way.

When it is remembered that all Washington County

[2] Father O'Brien did an enormous amount of work, but he spent little time in writing or preserving documents. Indeed, he carried this neglect to such an extreme that, were it not for tradition and an occasional letter, note or item found here and there, it might eventually have been forgotten that he was ever prior at Saint Rose's.

was then under the spiritual care of Saint Rose's, the reader may imagine the broad field open to the zeal of so tireless a harvester of souls. There were some twelve or fifteen "stations" in the parish, where the people, unable because of age or distance to attend church, were gathered at private houses, heard mass, received the sacraments, and listened to religious instructions.

Saint Dominic's, Springfield, and Holy Rosary, Manton (now Blincoe), were also attended by the community. Nor was this all. Danville and Harrodsburg, respectively the capitals of Boyle and Mercer counties, not to mention other stations in these districts and Garrard County, came within the sphere of apostolic activity allotted to the Friars Preacher.

We may fancy, but hardly portray, the labor, time and effort involved in a faithful ministration to these widely scattered people. It is no cause for wonder that, whether it was sunshine, or "rain," or "snow"; "or hot, or cold, or night, or day," one might meet the fathers "toiling on the way." None were met oftener than was the sturdy prior.

Rev. Joseph T. Ryan, the quondam superior and formerly missionary for those parts, Father O'Brien re-appointed shepherd over the faithful in Boyle, Mercer and Garrard counties. But the zealous superior himself not infrequently visited that portion of his flock, looking up "stray sheep," as he was wont to designate negligent and fallen-away Catholics, or seeking to bring in those not of the fold. A devoted ambassador of Christ, he longed for the realization of the promise of the Divine Saviour, when "there shall be one fold and one shepherd." [3] Like a good shepherd, he was ready to give

[3] John, X, 16.

his life for his flock. They knew him, and he knew them. He loved them, and they loved him.

Most of the missions were either too poor, or their Catholic members too few in numbers, to build and maintain a church. The Catholics about Harrodsburg, Thomsonville (the present Fenwick), Danville and Pleasant Run (now Simms), however, Father O'Brien felt should exert themselves to erect a house of worship in their midst. Doubtless it was in no small measure due to the spur of his zeal that those of the Harrodsburg neighborhood soon took steps to this end. So he writes, in this connection, to the ordinary of Louisville:

St. Rose's Convent,
December 16, 1856.

Right Rev. Bishop:—

. . . The Rev. Father Ryan has been lately at Harrodsburg. And I am happy to inform you that matters there look very flattering. The people of the town and vicinity have subscribed liberally—indeed, beyond his expectations.

All here are in the enjoyment of good health.

Wishing you the same blessing, and recommending myself and community to your prayers,

I remain yours in Christ,
M. A. O'Brien, O.S.D.
Right Rev. M. J. Spalding, D.D.,
Bishop of Louisville. [4]

[4] Louisville Diocesan Archives.—The records of the "National Soldiers' Home," Washington, D. C., show that as early as 1854, the last year of Father O'Brien's provincialship, the fathers obtained permission from that institution to erect an altar in the chapel of its "Branch Asylum" at Harrodsburg, Kentucky. Prior to that time, mass was said for the Catholics of the neighborhood at James McGarvey's, Shakertown. But now, it seems, the holy sacrifice was offered up for them and the invalid Catholic ex-soldiers in the chapel of the "Branch Asylum," until this portion of the institution was burned.

But the affair seems to have dragged along so slowly that this locality was not blessed with a church until after Father O'Brien had ceased to be prior. By that time, however, ground at least had been secured in the village for the purpose of erecting one.[5] At Thomsonville things went more rapidly. So he wrote to the same prelate:

St. Rose,
[Springfield], Kentucky.
November 19, 1857.

Right Rev. Bishop:—

..... I also beg permission to dedicate our little church at Thomsonville; which dedication, God willing, will take place on next Sunday two weeks, the 6th December.

Begging your blessing on us all,
I remain yours in Christ,

M. A. O'Brien, O.S.D.

Right Rev. M. J. Spalding, D.D.,
Bishop of Louisville.[6]

At the hamlet of Thomsonville a large double house had been purchased, and converted into a neat frame temple of prayer. It was picturesquely situated in one of the most romantic parts of Washington County. Father O'Brien dedicated it to the Blessed Virgin under the title of "Church of the Annunciation." The church at Harrodsburg was of brick, and when completed received the name of "Saint Mary's."[7]

[5] Father J. T. Ryan, Saint Rose's, September 10, 1857, to Bishop Spalding, Louisville (Louisville Archives); Saint Rose's Council Book, September 11, 1866.

[6] Louisville Archives.

[7] Beginning with 1864, the *Catholic Almanac* calls this church "St. Peter's." But Father Ryan's letter, as in the preceding note, shows that he wanted to give it the name of Saint Mary's. He so designates in Saint Rose's Council Book, January 30, 1861. Webb's *Centenary of Catholicity in Kentucky*, page 578, also calls it Saint Mary's. Now it is Saint Andrew's.

The people of Danville and the Pleasant Run Settlement, although they could not fail to see the need of a house of divine worship in their respective neighborhoods, were more dilatory to act. In this way, these missions had passed from under the pastoral care of Saint Rose's before they erected such sacred edifices for themselves. [8]

Except in the parishes of Springfield, Saint Rose and Manton, Catholics constituted a very small minority of the population in the American apostle's riding circuit. For this reason, his activity became the occasion of considerable criticism on the part of some prejudiced minds, especially of the rural ministers. More than one sought to engage him in public discussion on religious matters, hoping thus to dampen his ardor. These controversies, however, he declined as inconsistent with his principles and productive of harm rather than of good.

Yet one minister in the neighborhood of Thomsonville became so boastful and denunciatory in his charges that Father O'Brien felt constrained to accept his challenge. The time was set for the intellectual bout, and the people anticipated no little enjoyment. But when it became evident that the zealous priest was in earnest, his antagonist sent his regrets that he could not keep the appointment. Thus the matter came to an end. Nor did the missionary receive any further calls for debates.

[8] Saint Patrick's, Danville, was the first brick church begun, and the second finished, in Kentucky (O'Daniel, *Life of Bishop E. D. Fenwick*, p. 169, note 4). Through the failure of one Daniel McIlvoy, on whose land it was built, and the neglect to get a deed for this, it was soon sold to pay McIlvoy's debt (Webb, as in preceding note, p. 576). The Dominicans then took charge of the place; but no other church was built until about 1865 or 1866. The present church is Saints Peter and Paul's. Saint Ivo's, in the Pleasant Run district, was erected about the same time (1865 or 1866). It is now abandoned. The present church at Thomsonville, built by Rev. H. J. Rothheut, is called Saint Mary's.

During his provincialship, it will be recalled, Father O'Brien had begun the new Church of Saint Rose. As prior he labored assiduously on this structure. But, owing to the circumstance of its expensive character, the times and the locality, it rose with difficulty. There was little money in those days. The rural districts of Kentucky were *very* short in ready means. "Drives" had not come into vogue. One less patient and courageous than our Dominican Friar would have lost heart, perhaps even have given up the ungrateful task. Finally, in the summer of 1855, more than two years after it had been begun, the edifice was under roof, and could be used for divine service on Sundays. Accordingly, Father O'Brien now wrote to Doctor Spalding:

St. Rose's Convent,
Springfield, Kentucky,
July 5th, 1855.

Right Rev. and Respected Bishop:—

It is with pleasure that I at present inform you of the final completion of our new church. If it suit your convenience, I would suggest that the feast of St. Dominic, the fourth of August, would be a proper occasion for having it dedicated.

I would be much pleased also, Right Rev. Bishop, should you deliver, on the occasion, the dedication sermon. If Father [Benedict J.] Spalding's leisure permit him to be present on the occasion, his presence will be very acceptable.

I remain yours [very] respectfully,
M. A. O'Brien.

Right Rev. Bishop Spalding.[9]

For some reason which we have not discovered, but likely because of a previous engagement, Bishop Spalding could not accept the prior's invitation. With his

[9] Louisville Diocesan Archives.

ordinary's consent, therefore, Father O'Brien now hastily made other arrangements for the event.

In the new disposition the Right Rev. Richard P. Miles of Nashville was requested to perform the ceremony of dedication. Rev. James F. Wood of Cincinnati received an invitation to sing the mass. And here we may note that the future metropolitan of Philadelphia was a close friend and an ardent admirer of our apostolic Friar Preacher. The sermon for the occasion Father O'Brien assigned to Rev. Philip D. Noon, O.P., the eloquent president of Saint Joseph's College, near Somerset, Ohio. All three of these men acceded to the parts allotted them, and graced the occasion with their presence. Rev. Benedict J. Spalding, brother of Louisville's ordinary and vicar general of the diocese, was assistant to Doctor Miles.[10]

Father O'Brien was anxious that those who had contributed towards the erection of the sacred edifice should know that it was at last ready for divine services. Accordingly, he wrote to the *Catholic Telegraph*:

St. Rose's,
Springfield,
July 20, 1855.

Messrs. Editors:—

You will confer a special favor on me by inserting in the *Telegraph* that St. Rose's Church, of the Order of St. Dominic, will be consecrated on the 4th of next August, [this] being St. Dominic's Day.

I will feel very much obliged for this act of kindness.

I remain, Messrs. Editors, yours most respectfully,

Matthew A. O'Brien,
Springfield,
Kentucky.[11]

[10] The *Catholic Telegraph*, September 8, 1855.
[11] Issue of August 4, 1855.

Unfortunately, and no doubt much to the prior's sorrow, because of delays in the arrangements for the event and the slow mails, this notice did not reach Cincinnati in time. It was published only on the very day of the dedication, Friday, August 4, 1855. However, that feast of Saint Dominic was a joyful occasion for the superior, his community and the parish of Saint Rose. At last they had a temple of prayer in which to worship God.

In his account of the event a contributor to the *Catholic Telegraph*, probably Rev. James Wood, writes under the *nom de plume* of "A Spectator:"

> The Catholics of old Washington County may well be proud of this noble Gothic structure. To the untiring energy and zeal of Very Rev. M. A. O'Brien are they indebted for the completion of this monument to the glory of God. The church is finished in pure Gothic style. Four stained-glass windows ornament the sanctuary; and the beautiful altar table and richly finished tabernacle display the artistic taste and skill of the well-known architect, William Keely, of Louisville. The church is built of cut stone, blue limestone, and, including the sanctuary, is 125 feet long by about 52 wide. [12]

Although Saint Rose's had been dedicated, even despite the beautiful architectural appearance of the building, it had by no means received its final touches. The ceremony had simply been hastened that the people might have less cramped quarters for the worship of their Creator. The new edifice was built around the old brick church, which remained in use for divine services until it became necessary to tear it down. Then the faithful were packed into the recreation room of the

[12] Issue of September 8, 1855.

college. It was this congestion that accelerated the dedication of the church.

At that time the graceful octagonal tower which is today one of the principal ornaments of the sacred edifice, and through which is the main entrance to the structure, had scarcely begun to rise. The congregation used the side doors. The walls of the body of the church, it would seem, were not even plastered. Except in the sanctuary, there was no permanent floor. Nor were there any pews. The younger folk stood or knelt throughout the mass and sermon. For the aged and infirm there was an occasional bench. But those were heroic days, and these inconveniences (for no one considered them real hardships) elicited little, if any, complaint.

Twenty-five years ago, or even at a later date, the old members of the parish loved to entertain the younger generation with stories of the discomforts in the church for some years after it was built, of how long it took to finish it, and of Father O'Brien's tireless efforts that he might bring his work to completion. That the sanctuary and altar were made so pretty from the start was due to the missionary's devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. In this part of the house of God, even in its unfinished state, he would suffer naught that did not redound to the praise of the Eucharistic Lord. [13]

The sacred edifice, though so incomplete, was heavily encumbered with debt. Doubtless it was for this reason that, more than two years later, Bishop Spalding took

[13] In a conversation only a few weeks prior to this writing, Mr. John J. Stretch, whose name will occur again in these pages, spoke at great length on this very matter. Piles of stone, etc., were strewn all around the church for some years after its dedication.

advantage of his presence at Saint Rose's to urge upon the people their duty of greater generosity towards the earnest pastor, that he might bring his laudable work to completion. A contributor to the *Catholic Telegraph,* Cincinnati, who signs himself "Viator," tells us:

> On the same day [November 15, 1857] confirmation was administered to seventy-four persons in the large new church of St. Rose, the *Alma Mater* of the Dominicans in the United States. After the Gospel the Bishop preached to a large audience on the Gospel of the day, closing with an exhortation to the people to complete the good work so auspiciously commmenced, by assisting the Rev. Prior, Father O'Brien, to pay off the remaining debt. [14]

The holy man, however, seems to have been but little less wise in the ways of the world than he was in those of the soul. There was method in all that he did. He believed that, now the church was up, with the exception of the tower, the surest plan to arouse the generosity of the people would be to let them suffer considerable inconvenience. Besides, this would have the additional advantage of helping them to do penance for their sins. [15]

Father O'Brien felt that the congregation of Saint Rose should do something to attest its gratitude to God for the faithful services which it had always received from its priests, and to show its appreciation of being placed under the patronage of America's first canonized saint. The new church had this object in view no less than a manifestation of his own personal love for Saint

[14] The *Catholic Telegraph,* November 28, 1857.

[15] Not so many years ago one often heard about Father O'Brien frequently saying to the congregation: "Now, my good people, have patience; put up with these inconveniences; do penance for your sins, and your best to finish the church, and to pay for it. Then God will bless you."

Rose's; to which, nevertheless, we must add the greater glory of God, his motto in all things.

But, when the structure was sufficiently advanced to be used for divine service, the pastor prudently proceeded more slowly, and gradually reduced its indebtedness as the interior and tower neared completion. His aim was to have the edifice free of debt, when it should be finally finished. God blessed his good-will with this happy consummation, although it did not come until three years after the time of which we speak in the present chapter.

Even though he was notably negligent in his own personal appearance, and wore clothes that fitted him no better than those of the commonest laborer, the missionary had a splendid taste for architecture. Nature fashioned him a real artist in landscape-gardening. While the church arose, he made improvements on the convent. At the same time he erected a wall or fence of cut stone some five feet in height around the graveyard, and along the thoroughfare at the base of the steep hill on which stood the graceful rural fane.

The wall was broken on the eastern and western sides by arched gateways of the same material. From these stone portals gravel paths led up to the house of worship. Half way down from the front of the church the eminence was terraced. There a broad gravel walk, long known as Father O'Brien's Rosary path, ran parallel with the highway, and connected the two roads leading up to the edifice. The grounds about both church and convent were set with trees and shrubbery that completed a beautiful, conventual, homelike entourage.[16]

[16] Unfortunately, time has proved that the limestone used for these purposes is not good building material. It crumbles under exposure. Nor have the grounds been since properly cared for. The church is now in process of renovation.

The College of Saint Thomas of Aquin, which he had re-opened while provincial, also claimed much of the prior's attention. His paternal heart went out to boys and young men with an especial affection. He sought in every way to impregnate their minds with sound principles, that thus they might be prepared for the battle of life, and become useful citizens as well as good Christians. They loved him almost as much as he loved them.

A fosterer of education, our superior imbued the students both in the novitiate and in the college with habits of study. Perhaps, indeed, no prior ever took a keener interest in the novices of the Order. So did he continue to look for vocations; yet he would accept no applicant who did not give good promise of becoming a worthy minister of Christ. Some of the most useful lay brothers the province has ever had were trained at Saint Rose's during his provincialate and his priorship there.

Few elderly clergymen are so fond of children and youth as was Father O'Brien. This enabled him to remain young in spirit and in his ways, and aided him, in spite of his reticence, to win their affection no less than their confidence. They loved to attend the catechism class, which he himself always conducted when at home; nay, they were disappointed if another took his place. Long did they treasure the holy pictures and other little presents he distributed among them.

At Saint Rose's, as he had done on the missions in Ohio, our apostolic prior showed almost a mania for hearing confessions. He spent much of his time in the tribunal of divine reconciliation. People came to him

from all distances to be freed from the burdens of their consciences. Nor was he ever too busy to hear their tales of woe. Although uniformly patient and kind, these beautiful traits of the anointed servant of Christ showed to special advantage when he was closeted with some hardened sinner whom he sought to convert.

Ever and always was Father O'Brien on the alert for such as these, or for the wayward and negligent. Any place of privacy served him as well as the conventional sanctum for hearing their confessions. He never hesitated to approach them. But his tact and skill, his gentle ways and thoughtful consideration for their feelings, forestalled all wounds, while they rarely failed to accomplish his benevolent designs.

County-court days at Springfield served the hunter of souls well for the exercise of his zeal along this line. On such occasions public auctions and other matters of interest brought people from far and wide to the capital of the county. This was our apostle's chance. Rarely, if ever, as long as he remained at Saint Rose's, did he fail to be in town on county-court day, if he could possibly get there.

At the homes of several Catholic families, particularly that of John Polin, brother of his former novice master, Father O'Brien had the parlor reserved for himself on these occasions. Thence he issued forth, and unostentatiously made his way among the crowds until he discovered some man who stood in need of his ministrations. The spiritual prey was now led to his place of retreat, where he reconciled him to God. This done, the harvester of Christ started immediately in search of another sin-stained soul that he might cleanse it with

the merits of the Saviour's passion. So he spent the livelong day, with perhaps no more to eat than a crust of bread.

Charity was one of the missionary's most striking traits. It helped to win him many friends; it brought scores upon scores of persons who sought his assistance or his advice in family troubles, in financial straits, in mental perplexities—briefly, in almost every kind of distress, whether of body, mind or soul.

The kind-hearted priest seemed never to weary of helping the poor. Indeed, at times, he almost transgressed the bounds of prudence, and exposed his convent to no little inconvenience. But he felt that these beloved ones of God had claims that could not be neglected.

So again, did the zealous pastor take a paternal interest in the colored slaves. Strongly did he urge upon the white masters their obligations to treat them with kindness, to instruct them in the Catholic religion, to see that they led good Christian lives. By all was the unpretentious priest regarded as a father to the poor and to the black man. In former years one used frequently to hear the older African members of the parish express their admiration for him somewhat after this fashion:

"Father Brien," the "O' " was invariably omitted, "might a' been a little strict, and he might a' been a little queer, too. But I tell you, man, he was a saint; and he was awful' good to us colored folk. I tell you he did give it to the white folk who didn't treat us right. Father Brien saved the soul of many a poor colored person. If one did as Father Brien told him, he surely went to heaven."

During these three years Father O'Brien preached assiduously, and in widely separated places. Everywhere his sermons produced a profound effect. They never failed to draw large audiences, in which were always found not a few non-Catholics. Everywhere he went, but perhaps especially in Kentucky, he wielded a really mysterious influence over those who were not members of the Church, whatever their religious affiliations. They held the true priest of God in almost as high regard as did the Catholics themselves. By many he was positively revered. He made numerous converts.

In bygone days the writer knew a number of Protestants who really idolized the Dominican Friar. They contributed generously towards the building of Saint Rose's Church, and would gladly put themselves to great inconvenience that they might do him a favor. They cherished his memory long after his death. Yet, strange to say, they did not come into the Church. But this only goes to show that faith is a divine gift which comes from God, not from man. Why these people were not numbered among Father O'Brien's converts can be known only to Him who scrutinizes the hearts of men. It is not for us to pass judgment.

With all his busy life our Preaching Friar cultivated a profound spirit of prayer and religion. Wherever he was, or whatever he had to do, he never neglected his mass, if at all possible to say it, or omitted his meditation. The breviary was his constant companion, and he snatched frequent moments for other converse with God. Without affectation, his attitude, when engaged in such pious exercises, was exceptionally devotional. Much of the night was given to them, for he slept little.

In spite of his great labors, he ate very sparingly, and practised many mortifications. His spirit pervaded the community over which he presided. Religious observance was perhaps never more exact or regular at Saint Rose's than during his priorship. When he was at home, none were more punctual and exemplary in the fulfillment of the law than was the superior. With Father O'Brien to toil and to save souls was to pray, for this was his vocation, as it is that of every faithful Friar Preacher.

In his zeal the faithful ambassador of Christ loved all men in the sight of God. He had an equal longing for the salvation of all. In this regard he made no distinction between friend and enemy. Yet he had great natural affection, and was warmly attached to those to whom he was bound by bonds of amity or gratitude. While he himself shrank from honors, and sought to avoid authority, it was a source of keen delight for him when his clerical friends were promoted to a dignity or office which he felt they would grace by their virtue and ability.

Thus he rejoiced on hearing, early in 1857, that the Revs. Henry D. Juncker and James F. Wood, of the Diocese of Cincinnati, had been appointed respectively bishop of Alton, Illinois, and co-adjutor to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Although the retiring priest usually evaded occasions of this kind, he gladly accepted an invitation to be present at the episcopal consecration of these two clergymen in the April of that year.

As in Ohio, so in Kentucky many Catholics were convinced that our missionary possessed superhuman powers. In this connection, we may instance first a

case which we have often heard from the person himself who was concerned in it. He was then a young farmer and a dealer in livestock.

Father O'Brien, rather hard put for means, asked this gentleman to make him a present of two mules that he might use them to haul stone, etc., for the construction of Saint Rose's. As might have been expected, the man, just then starting in life, demurred at so expensive a gift. "Tom," then said Father O'Brien, "God loveth the cheerful giver. Let me have the mules for the church; and I promise you in His name not only that this will be a good year for you, but also that you will prosper."

The donation was made. So were the priest's promises fulfilled. The year in which the sacrifice was rendered, we have often heard the gentleman say, was the best of his life. Not only this. Mr. Simms became one of the most prosperous farmers and traders in Washington County, Kentucky, and has always candidly believed that his success was a reward for the aid which he gave to Christ's faithful servant in an hour of need.

Another incident somewhat similar to the above is told of one Abel Thomas, who had lately purchased a farm. He was still in considerable debt, but had laid aside a few hundred dollars to make a payment on the land. Under the promise that God would bless and prosper him, Father O'Brien pursuaded him to give this money towards building Saint Rose's Church. It turned out as the priest foretold. From a poor man Thomas became a well-to-do farmer. He attributed this to the missionary's prayers. Until recent years Abel Thomas' house was used as a "station" in the parish.

Still a third case along the same lines regards an old neighbor of the writer's boyhood days. More than once have we heard it from the man himself and his sons. He was a friend of Saint Rose's prior who was then sorely pressed for ready cash for his church. Knowing that this gentleman had some money, Father O'Brien asked for it. Naturally, as the request involved quite a sum for that day, there was a demurral.

"But, Parker," said Father O'Brien, "I *must* make a payment on the church debt, and yours is the only money I know of. Give it to God, who will return it with interest. The corn crop is poor this year; so the price of pork will be high. Get a herd of swine, fatten them on the mast in your woods, and you will make much more than I ask of you in the Lord's name."

The farmer was overcome by his pastor's plea, as well as assured by his promise of gain. Accordingly, Osbourn made the sacrifice and followed the counsel given him. He, too, reaped a generous reward.[17]

History and experience teach the necessity of caution and reserve before accepting reports that might arise from the imagination and credulity of trustful and uncritical minds. But there are too many and too well substantiated traditions and extraordinary things told about Father O'Brien for them all to be void of truth and without foundation. Nor should they be overlooked in the narrative of his life, even though the exact date of their occurrence cannot now be determined. From those which certainly, or almost certainly, belong to the period of his priorship at Saint Rose's we select the following.

[17] These are but a few of the many kindred instances that indicate the faith of the people in the missionary's extraordinary power before the throne of heaven.

The first to which we would call attention are contained in the annexed letter from a member of Saint Catherine's Convent, a short distance from the house over which Father O'Brien presided so happily. He took a most paternal interest in that community, and aided the sisters in every possible way. Sister Mary Villana, the authoress of the document, who was then a young girl in the world, knew him well, and came to know him even better after she entered Saint Catherine's Community. In spite of her advanced years, she is still hearty, alert, vigorous and in full possession of all her mental faculties—a matter-of-fact woman, with a fund of good common sense. She writes:

St. Catherine's Convent,
Springfield, Kentucky,
January 22, 1922.

Rev. dear Father:—

In speaking with Mother about many happy memories I have of St. Rose's and the early Fathers and Sisters, I mentioned particularly Father O'Brien. Mother suggested that I should send you a few notes on my recollections. This I do most willingly, and will be happy if in the smallest way they may be of use to you in the life of "dear old Father O'Brien," which I am certainly glad is being written; for I consider it a most commendable work.

The home of Mary B. Jaynes was about seven miles from St. Rose on the other side of Springfield. It always served as a sort of a mission for Father O'Brien in his priestly ministrations to his more distant flock. The Blessed Sacrament was not kept there, but a section of the house was set apart for the celebration of Holy Mass and the convenience of the priest. About this old home there are many cherished memories of Father O'Brien. The love and respect which the community felt for him are most memorable; yet they were but a response to his own noble character and lovable personality. Nor was this the attitude of Catholics alone toward

the venerable priest. Non-Catholics too felt his sanctity and holiness; and in his Christ-like charity, his heart went out to them as to his own.

On one occasion, while attending the sick of the neighborhood, he went to Mrs. Jaynes and asked her assistance and that of the neighbors in building the church at St. Rose. For this purpose, Mrs. Jaynes summoned Catholics and non-Catholics to her home to listen to Father O'Brien's appeal. So touchingly did he address them that, when he finished, one thousand dollars were immediately pledged by those present. It is noteworthy that many of these men were members of the bitter Know-Nothing Party. After the meeting, supper was served, and in his tender goodness Father O'Brien joined the others, sharing in the pleasure of their simple friendship.

Mr. T.....B. J..... [a proud, stubborn man who lived in the immediate vicinity] had not been faithful to his religious duties, and had been at the same time negligent in the training of his children—so much, in fact, that three of them professed no religion at all. In old age, the thought of the justice of God so terrified Mr. J.....that his friends feared he would die of despair. After many earnest entreaties that he would consent to see a priest, he finally asked for Father O'Brien.

The holy man soon arrived, and showed the despairing sinner the way to God's mercy. While his confession was being heard, a beautiful white dove which was seen and heard by the entire household, perched just outside his window and cooed until the sacrament was completed. Then it flew away immediately. Thereafter the negligent man led a good Catholic life, and he died the death of the just.[18]

It was the custom of Mrs. Jaynes to bring all the negro servants together in the evening for prayers, catechism and instructions. Father O'Brien, when visiting the house, always went to see these lowly people, encouraged them, and spoke kindly to them of God. He was ever solicitous for their spiritual good; and they certainly loved him.

Father O'Brien impressed profoundly even those who did not know him. Mere business association with him was for many a

[18] Sister Villana was closely related to the Jaynes.

participation in something very virtuous, so keenly was his holiness felt even in such circumstances. At the request of the Jaynes family, a gentleman from Missouri called upon Father O'Brien to see if the tombstone was restored, which had been removed from Mrs. Jaynes' grave while the church of St. Rose was under construction.[19] As soon as Father O'Brien heard what his errand was, he greeted him most cordially and invited him to dine with the priests.

The gentleman was a non-Catholic, and had never before conversed with a priest. So impressed was he that many, many times he spoke of Father O'Brien, and always with the greatest reverence and appreciation of his sanctity.

Father O'Brien's holiness and the wonderful things he did gave the people almost unlimited belief in his power. Perhaps Kentucky never had another priest whose sermons made so strong an impression on his audience. And this is the more strange because there was nothing in the man himself, or in what he said, that would explain it. It was not unusual for the whole congregation to rise up at some telling point of the sermon. The preacher would then put his hands over his eyes until all sat down. Some used to say that they saw a light over his head at times when he was preaching; and others said they saw a dove. Of course, I cannot vouch for all this, but it certainly shows that his sermons produced an extraordinary effect.[20]

I have often thought that it would be a shame to allow the work and the memory of so great and good a man as Father O'Brien to be forgotten. So I am glad that his life is being written at last, the more so because he was so kind to our Community. It is too bad that the work was not begun twenty-five or thirty years ago, when there were ever so many old people in St. Rose's parish and its former missions—and elsewhere, too—who could have given you any amount of matter for it.

I do hope that the facts contained in my letter may be of some

[19] Some of the Jaynes had then moved to Missouri.

[20] These extraordinary phenomena were often spoken of in Kentucky and Ohio in years gone by. They were referred to by more than one old person on a recent visit of the writer in those states.

service to you, be it ever so little. I send them most willingly, and with heartfelt wishes for success in your undertaking.

Respectfully yours in St. Dominic,

Sister Mary Villana [O.S.D.].

Nor should we omit from this part of our narrative an event that produced much consternation, and was long spoken of in Saint Rose's Parish.

One Sunday, Father O'Brien heard loud voices at the time of mass. He went at once to the graveyard. There he discovered several men engaged in boisterous conversation. He told them to go into the church. One of them, an unsavory character whose name we forbear to mention, turned on God's anointed servant, and heaped all manner of insult and contumely not only on him, but even on religion. Nor would he desist from his blasphemy.

Finally, the apostle, as if by inspiration, replied: "N—, it will not be long before you send for me to prepare you to meet God; and you will be buried where you stand." So it happened the very next week.

It was not an unusual thing for the parishioners to have their saintly pastor bless the fields which they intended to cultivate in the hope that his prayers would bring them a more abundant yield. A striking instance of this character which is still occasionally talked about in the neighborhood regards one Hilary Gettings, whose home faced the church, perhaps a half-mile distant. His crops had failed for several years. He therefore had the prior bless his entire farm. The next season Gettings reaped a splendid harvest.

During his term of priorship, Father O'Brien was frequently away from home on missionary tours or for

the purpose of procuring means to complete his beloved Saint Rose's. He uniformly turned his travels, whatever their object, into hunts for souls. Once at least he journeyed down the Mississippi River as far as New Orleans.

On his way back from the south the agent of Christ gave his attention again to the men employed on the levees of the river, for he had learned in former years the sad spiritual condition of Catholic laborers engaged in this work. One evening, after many hours of apostolic toil, he went to an inn, as there was no other place where he could hope to find lodgment.

Tired and weary from the day's travail, the Friar Preacher hastened to take his usual scanty supper. Then he asked for a room, but was told by the proprietor of the inn that he could not be accommodated for the night. Every available place had been taken.

Father O'Brien pleaded for mercy. He was worn out, and needed rest. Finally his host informed him that he had a haunted apartment which no one would occupy; that several men who had last taken it were found dead the next morning; and that, if he wished to sleep in this room at his own risk, he might do so. To this the jaded priest consented, for he had no sense of fear and little credence in ghost stories. The bed was now made, and he retired at once.

Here in this humble, old-time tavern by the waters of the Mississippi occurred a curious incident which we must not omit. It is too interesting and illustrative of that day. At the time it aroused much speculation.

Early the next morning, as the way-worn traveller did not appear, the hosteler went to his guest's room in

full expectation of discovering another fatality. He knocked at the door, but received no answer. Then he entered the apartment. It was filled with smoke from the lamp which had burned out. In the bed lay Father O'Brien on his back. His hands clasped a book to his breast. There was every appearance of death. The frightened inn-keeper now shook the prostrate form, when no less to his surprise than to his delight the priest calmly opened his eyes, and bade him good morning.

Work among the laborers on the levees during the day had not permitted the Dominican to say all the divine office. When, therefore, he entered his room, he threw himself on the bed, and began to read his breviary. Exhausted from overwork, Father O'Brien had no sooner finished his prayers than he fell asleep. It was thus that the lamp had been left lighted all night. Aroused from his slumbers by the keeper of the inn, he opened the book. One may imagine his surprise and horror when he found a huge tarantula crushed between its leaves, just where he had concluded his office.

Evidently the venomous spider had made its characteristic rush to sink its poisonous fangs into the priest's hands just when he closed his breviary, and unconsciously caught it in time to save himself from a painful wound. Because of the popular belief, which was then universal, that the bite of a tarantula is deadly, the inn-keeper, quite naturally, now felt he had discovered the cause of the deaths in his hostelry. Father O'Brien himself was no less convinced that providence had protected him from death.

Others believed that the apostolic man was saved by a miracle. This opinion, in fact, became so firm and so

widespread as certainly to make the incident deserve a place in our narrative.[21] The anecdote itself is fortunate in that it affords us a good insight into the hardships and privations which the messenger of divine mercy had often to confront in his efforts to apply the merits of Christ to souls in out-of-the-way localities.

The Friar Preacher's missionary labors and efforts to get help also carried him to Saint Louis, where he effected a conversion that was singular and extraordinary in many ways. The Most Rev. Peter R. Kenrick, following his usual custom when Father O'Brien was in his diocese, gave him *carte blanche* in the exercise of his priestly zeal. But, as the city had been visited by many seekers for help, his grace rather demurred to the request for permission to collect for Saint Rose's. Yet, possibly in part to avoid hurting the holy man's feelings by a positive refusal, and in part to test the marvellous power which he was said to exercise over non-Catholics, the leave to quest was finally granted on condition that he would convert a certain lady.

This woman was noted for her strong prejudices against Catholicity, which she carried so far that she invariably insulted priests, wherever she met them. She would even cross the street in order to vent her spleen in this way. Her house stood opposite the cathedral residence, and she had become a nuisance to the clergy.

Father O'Brien was told all this, that he might know how difficult the task would be. His only words were:

[21] Quite naturally, this singular incident was long the frequent subject of conversation among Father O'Brien's friends and acquaintances. For many it was proof positive of his holiness and of God's special protection over His faithful servant. If we consider the belief then universally prevailing that a tarantula's bite was almost certainly fatal, such a conclusion was no more than logical.

"Well, I'll try." The archbishop then took him to a front window, and showed him where the lady lived.

Our Dominican now started on what, humanly speaking, was an impossible errand. Archbishop Kenrick waited at the window to see what would happen. With him were Rev. Patrick J. Ryan, his secretary, and Rev. John Hennessy, later the metropolitans respectively of Philadelphia and Dubuque. Both were no less keenly interested in the case than dubious as to its outcome. Father O'Brien knocked at the woman's portal. No sooner did she learn that he was a Catholic priest than she slammed the door in his face. This was precisely what Dr. Kenrick and his companions expected, and they felt that the interview was ended.

But Father O'Brien, quite undaunted by the insult, abided his time. After a few minutes, he rapped again. Again was the door violently shut against him. To the no little surprise of the clerical spectators across the way, the missionary still held his ground. He knocked a third time, and as the door opened he quickly slipped his foot in between it and the jamb so that it could not be closed. Thus was he finally brought *vis-à-vis* with her ladyship. Shrill, angry words were heard on the other side of the street. However, they soon died down. The three onlookers could hardly believe their eyes when they saw the woman stand back, and Father O'Brien walk into the house.

Archbishop Kenrick and Fathers Ryan and Hennessy then retired, wondering what would be the result of the encounter. They did not have long to wait. In no more than half an hour the wonderworker returned to bring them the good news.

An expostulation with the lady for so outrageously treating a gentleman of his age and a representative of the oldest Christian Church had softened her temper, and gained the harvester of souls an entrance into her home. Her prejudice was the outgrowth of ignorance. A friendly talk on the claims of the Catholic religion not only further modified her antagonism, but likewise won from her a promise to read a catechism and a small book of religious instruction which he left at the house.

Nor was this all. The missionary stopped at the episcopal rectory, whence, with the archbishop's blessing, he went about his work of collecting. He paid his new-found friend several visits, and before he left Saint Louis she signified a wish to enter the Church. He then presented her to Father Ryan for further preparation. The conversion of this lady, which was sincere and thorough, Archbishop Kenrick and his priestly companions regarded as nothing short of the miraculous. She became an excellent Catholic.

Apart from the combative character of this woman, her conversion is but a sample of the many made by our modern apostle. It was partly effected by the means which he usually employed, a catechism and a little work on Christian doctrine with which he always went supplied for just such work. However, the bringing of this lady into the Church was considered a miracle, and was long spoken of as such in Saint Louis by those who knew her before she became a Catholic. It is still occasionally brought up in conversation.

In after years, when he had been transferred to Philadelphia, Archbishop Ryan, rarely, if ever, met a Dominican whom he did not tell about this incident in

Father O'Brien's life. Nor did he fail to ask why the Order had not taken steps to have him canonized. He felt that it was a shame that no such efforts were made. So was he strong in his belief that the American Church has had no subject more worthy of this high honor than our apostolic Friar Preacher.

The learned prelate was convinced that Father O'Brien was a saint, for he firmly believed the conversion of which we have spoken was a miracle. So had he evidence that the missionary practised virtue to a heroic degree. On his visits in Saint Louis, the archbishop always declared, the man of God took almost no sleep; he ate barely sufficient to keep body and soul together; the nights he gave to prayer; the days he spent in search for sinners or in other good deeds. He mortified himself in every way. A true spirit of piety, humility and obedience was manifest in his every action. He had the single-minded purpose and did the work of a genuine apostle.[22]

Some years ago the Rev. John T. McNicholas, O. P., now the bishop of Duluth, Minnesota, made known the facts we have just laid before the reader to the late Miss Eleanor Donnelly, the noted Catholic authoress and poetess, who then spent her winters in the National Capitol. She therefore thought she would like to write the life of such a priest, and asked Archbishop Ryan for his recollections of Father O'Brien.

But the venerable prelate, whose health had begun

[22] A number of the fathers to whom Archbishop Ryan spoke about the missionary and this incident in his life are still living. The late Rev. Charles H. McKenna, O.P., an intimate friend of that prelate, never tired telling of the archbishop's veneration for Father O'Brien. Father McKenna himself knew the hunter of souls well, and regarded him as one of God's elect.

to fail, wrote only a brief reply. Age, cares and infirmity had also commenced to make inroads on Miss Donnelly's literary activity. In this way, the proposed biography did not materialize. The archbishop's letter, however, deserves preservation, as well as makes a fitting conclusion for the present chapter. It says:

Philadelphia, January 4, 1908.

My dear Miss Donnelly:—

I entertain great veneration and affection for the memory of good old Father O'Brien. But as I met him only on the occasions of his visits to St. Louis, I could be of little or no use to you in preparing the proposed biography. I often wondered why some of his religious brothers had not prepared such a work long ago, or asked some one like yourself to do so, and provided the materials which must be abundant. He was a great friend of my predecessor, Archbishop Wood, whom he knew when they both lived in Ohio. It will be well for Father McNicholas to consult the archives of the Dominican monasteries of Kentucky and Ohio, and to get information from some of the older members of the laity of the congregations which he established in these states.

Wishing you from my heart all success in your good work of rescuing from comparative oblivion the memory of a saint and an Apostle,

I am, dear Miss Donnelly,

Yours most faithfully in Christo,

P. J. Ryan. [23]

[23] Copy furnished by Right Rev. John T. McNicholas.

CHAPTER XII

VARIOUS OCCUPATIONS

True man of God that he was, the modern apostle preferred to serve rather than to command. He craved the merit of obedience. It was, therefore, with sentiments of real pleasure that, on the expiration of his priorship, he again laid down the burden of responsibility, and took his place with the lowliest in the rank and file of the province. This was near the close of 1857, after three years of most strenuous labors.

But with our Dominican to be without authority did not mean to take life easy. Indeed, he could not be idle—could not, as the old Romans would have expressed it, content himself with *otium cum dignitate.* Activity of some kind was a necessity for him. Thus the apostolic priest was never so happy as when, under the impulse of his zeal, he was engaged in harvesting souls. Of this he made a prayer which, if we may judge by results, was most acceptable in the sight of God. A true Friar Preacher, faithfully did he follow in the footsteps of Saint Dominic, the founder of his Order.

The Rev. Sydney Albert Clarkson was chosen prior of Saint Rose's to succeed our missionary. Almost immediately, at an assembly of the community council, Father O'Brien was elected procurator or syndic of the

institution.[1] No doubt, the selection of the former superior and provincial for this unpleasant and burdensome office was largely that he might have a freer hand to finish and to pay for the new church. Yet it was a position which one would think must have proved a handicap in his apostolic administrations.

We wonder, in fact, how the brave priest, dauntless as was his courage and unflagging his energy, combined the disparate labors of procurator and harvester of souls in the successful manner which tradition attributes to him. God, however, often so blesses the efforts of his faithful servants that they win where others would fail.

Besides, the Friar Preacher possessed no mean powers of organization, and had a happy faculty for harmonizing discordant tasks. At odd times, or when an opportunity presented itself, he would take his cane, a constant companion whenever afoot, and stroll over the large convent farm. His keen eye took in everything at a glance. His quick, practical mind told him in a moment what should be done. Good judgment and a methodical temperament outlined the manner and the order of accomplishment.

On such occasions, possibly, in order to save his trusty horse for journeys in behalf of religion, our syndic never rode. Still, for he was a rapid walker, he lost little time by the performance of his duties in this fashion.

Doubtless Father Clarkson, a most kindly man, and Rev. Joseph T. Ryan, a practical genius who had filled about every position in the convent, were a source of

[1] Odd notes and records here and there bear out the tradition of Father O'Brien's procuratorship. Mr. John Stretch, whose letter we shall soon produce, gave the time of his election to the office.

great help to the sorely tried man. The lay brothers, we cannot but believe, did their best to aid so paternal a procurator. No doubt, too, he also received much assistance from the trusty colored servants of the community. They loved him for his interest in the welfare of their souls and his goodness towards their temporal needs. Loyal were they to him, tradition tells us, and careful to do his every wish—carried out the instructions of the paternal syndic during his absences, however long, with scrupulous fidelity.[2]

Yet, in spite of the change of our apostle's position from superior to subject, the present chapter almost blends into that which precedes it. Both deal with the same field of labor, and with practically the same lines of work. Lack of dates makes it impossible to determine precisely in which chapter some of the events belonging to this time should be recorded.

Thus the subjoined letter, written by one who knew Father O'Brien intimately, falls aptly in place here. It

[2] The fidelity and love of the country's former slaves for masters who were kind to them are often overlooked by writers on that unfortunate civic institution. One of the author's most pleasant recollections is of "Uncle Fred" Ray and his wife, "Aunt Alice." Alice belonged to Saint Rose's. Fred was a freeman, but from the time of his marriage he lived at Saint Rose's.

Even after the wife's emancipation Fred and Alice spent practically all their lives in the employment of the convent, which they so loved that they could not be happy elsewhere. They were both clever, lived to extreme old age, died within three hours of each other, were buried at the same time and in the same grave, February 27, 1912. Their funeral, with a solemn requiem mass, was largely attended alike by whites and blacks. The late Father Eugene V. Flood preached, paying a beautiful tribute to their virtues.

The lives of these two negroes are a part of Saint Rose's history. Their recollections of the old times made them extremely interesting in conversation. Father O'Brien was one of the priests for whom they entertained a special affection. They were the last of Saint Rose's former servants, all of whom the convent provided for when they were no longer able to take care of themselves.

bears largely on the period of the missionary friar's life covered by the two chapters, draws a true picture of his character and toils, and shows the marvellous impression he made upon those with whom he came into contact. Neither can it fail to be of interest to the reader. All this gives the document an importance which justifies its reproduction in full.

55 A Bates Street, N. W.,
Washington, D. C.,
January 10, 1922.

Rev. and dear Father:—

It affords me great pleasure to give you some of my reminiscenses of dear, saintly Father O'Brien. As you likely know, when he was provincial, he reopened St. Thomas's College which had formerly been run in connection with St. Rose's Convent. This reopened college I attended from 1856 to 1859; that is, for about three years.

My parents then lived at Danville, which was attended by the fathers from St. Rose's; but Father Joseph T. Ryan was the priest who usually gave us the mass, and he always stopped at my father's (Michael Stretch's) house. Thus before going to college, I had seen very little of Father O'Brien. However, you could not see him even once, and forget him.

At school I got to know him very well. In fact, I may say that I came into what I may call intimate contact with the noted priest, and I loved him with all my heart. However, as I remember, his zeal for souls kept him away from home much of the time. Indeed, although he was prior when I first went to college, he spent more of his time on missionary journeys than at the Convent. When the holy man was at home, he was always as busy as a bee in doing good of one kind or another.

The people everywhere regarded Father O'Brien, and I think rightly, as a saint. They came in numbers and from great distances to lay the burdens of their souls at his feet, and to consult him on all sorts of affairs. He seemed to have a passion for hearing con-

fessions, and when at home he spent much of his time in the confessional. It was the same on the missions. He never tired at this work. Perhaps no priest was ever better liked as a confessor than was Father O'Brien. Even hardened sinners seemed to choose him in preference to all others, when they wished to make their peace with God, for they felt that he would surely find their every sin.

Father O'Brien's zeal along this line led him into ways, which in the present day and generation would be considered extreme, and called odd. Perhaps he was a little odd. He directed such efforts towards men principally, for whom he had a special liking. And I have often heard it said that wherever he met a Catholic man whom he suspected needed the sacrament, that man had to go to confession then and there. To people of to-day this may seem strange. But it was Father O'Brien's method; and he had a way of dealing with sinners that was so gentle and persuasive that it never gave offense. It was all his own, it is true, but it was none the less winning and effective. Rarely did Father O'Brien fail in such efforts for good. The world will never know how much he accomplished for souls in this work of his extraordinary ministry.

I hardly know how to describe Father O'Brien's preaching. His language was the plainest and simplest. His comparisons and metaphors were all taken from the common, everyday things of life. He made few gestures, but he put great force and earnestness into his sermons. The whole man spoke, and one could see that he meant every word he said. Father O'Brien belonged to the old school of clergymen. While he was kindness itself in the confessional, he believed in using the pulpit to strike terror into the heart of the evildoer. Rarely did he fail in this effort. Yet he could plead the cause of God's love and affection with a pathos and persuasive power that were irresistible.

One would hardly call Father O'Brien a great orator according to the rules of oratory. His voice was thin and high-pitched, and rather disagreeable. The few gestures he made were awkward. His appearance in the pulpit was not at all striking. His bearing was ungainly, and it seemed impossible for him to keep his habit straight. His sentences were short and jerky—often broken. Father O'Brien had no time for rounded periods. He always spoke directly

to the point, striking the nail squarely on the head every time. Yet, when he got well into his sermon, the listener forgot everything except the spirit of the preacher and what he was saying. One could not hear this priest preach without being stirred to the very depths of his soul. Perhaps the secret of Father O'Brien's wonderful power to sway his audience lay in the realization that he was truly a man of God delivering the message of Christ.

Father O'Brien was of a retiring disposition, and as simple as a child. In conversation he ordinarily had little to say. I never saw a man who wasted fewer words. Yet he was extremely affable, and had a happy faculty of making one feel perfectly at home in his company. He was the soul of charity. There was no inconvenience to which he would not go in order to do a favor. These qualities combined with his zeal and piety to make Father O'Brien a most lovable man. The boys in the college, as did almost everybody, idolized him. They would do anything for him. He had a great affection for children, and always sought to win their confidence.

Strange though it may seem, as I have said, no one who ever met this saintly priest could forget him. There was positively nothing attractive in his personal appearance. His gait was almost slouchy. He was quite careless and indifferent in dress. He made no pretension to intellectual attainments. But there was something in the man, in his demeanor, and in the eye that seemed to see clear through you, that left a lasting impression. Wherever you saw him, you felt that verily there was a man of God at the work of God. He made many wonderful conversions, and did many extraordinary things. The people generally believed that he had the power of working miracles.

Through all my long life, even during the days I spent as a Union soldier in the Civil War, Father O'Brien has been an inspiration to me. So long as I live I cannot cease to cherish his memory.

Very truly yours,

John J. Stretch.

Despite his great age (he is now in his eighties), Mr. Stretch, the author of the foregoing document, is still at work (as we write) and in possession of a good mind

and a retentive memory. His veneration for Father O'Brien has led to a number of conversations that have recalled facts about the great missionary which were in danger of being forgotten, as well as served to refreshen the writer's recollections on more than one tradition. In this way, the former student at Saint Rose's was of great help in the compilation of our narrative.

Among the facts thus brought back to mind was an erstwhile vineyard of the convent, whose principal purpose was to supply the community with wine for the mass. The neighboring priests also, and even the bishop, often obtained their altar wine from this source.[3] With Father O'Brien nothing could be too good for the Lord. Thus he took great interest in the vineyard, and would spend no little time, when at home, in its care. He pruned the vines himself. Possibly the splendid grapes that are said to have grown there were largely due to his attention. Although of little importance in itself, this means much in that it shows the Friar Preacher's zeal and simplicity in promoting the cause of religion even in small matters.

One of Mr. Stretch's explanations of why Father O'Brien "was so thin and raw-boned" is that "he was always so busy that he had no time to take on any flesh." To this reason, however, may be added another, of which the genial old gentleman likely had no idea; namely, the priest's spirit of abstemiousness and mortification, which he carried so far that at times it became necessary for his superior to modify his ardor. He did penance for himself, and for the sins of others.

[3] The convent had its own vineyard from the days of its foundation until well into the second half of the last century. Several old letters and records show that the fathers often supplied other priests with altar wine.

A more docile or obedient subject a superior could scarcely desire than was this modern apostle. When at the convent, he never failed to attend the religious exercises of the community. He was a model in everything good, his life an edification and an inspiration for all. With the evening began his vigils and reading. It was then that he thought out the sermons which so entranced his audiences, for they were not wholly spontaneous.

Father O'Brien never lost a moment. Go to his room at any time of day or night, unless it were the small hours of the morning, when he usually took his little repose, and you caught him—if you found him at all—on his knees before a crucifix or a madonna, or with a book in hand, preferably the Scriptures, the life of some saint, or a spiritual treatise.

On his way from place to place in the performance of his duties, or when with the workmen at their tasks, he constantly passed his well-worn Rosary between his fingers, and counted off the *Paters* and *Aves* in honor of the Mother of God, for whom he cultivated the tenderest devotion. This was one of his favorite orisons. He loved to make visits to the Eucharistic Lord, before whom he poured out his soul in honor and adoration. Often was he absorbed in meditation, or rapt in thought on the things of heaven.

Another topic that arose more than once in the course of these conversations with the quondam student of Saint Thomas' College were the frequent and strange sick calls that came for the apostle from distant and unexpected places. Often have we also heard others speak of these unaccountable occurrences in Father O'Brien's life.

Perhaps "unaccountable" is the most appropriate adjective to use in this connection, for his whole career as a priest was so singular and exceptional that nothing should be considered strange or unexpected in his regard. Certainly nothing that betided him surprised his confrères. With him the most extraordinary experiences were considered commonplace. On this subject, however, we shall have to touch rather frequently before the close of our narrative.

In spite of his other labors, Father O'Brien had possibly never given himself to a more intensive apostolate for souls in Kentucky than he did during the period covered by the present chapter. The years 1858 and 1859, in fact, were a busy season for the clergy of that state. The former year is noted for a promulgation of a jubilee by Pius IX in gratitude and thanksgiving for the triumphant reception accorded him by his people while on a tour of the Papal States in 1857. Another purpose of the Pontiff in this jubilee was to obtain prayers from the faithful for the good and prosperity of the Church, the Holy See and religion, then so seriously threatened, and peace for the Christian world.[4]

Throughout the Diocese of Louisville the Catholics made this jubilee in a deeply religious spirit. Everywhere crowds flocked to the churches to hear the sermons, receive the sacraments, and offer up their prayers before the divine throne for the intentions of the Holy Father. The priests were overwhelmed with the multitude of confessions. Nowhere did the people respond more heartily to the call of their bishop and their su-

[4] The *Catholic Telegraph,* March 20, 1858. The jubilee was promulgated on September 25, 1857.

preme pastor than did those in the parish and missions of Saint Rose.[5]

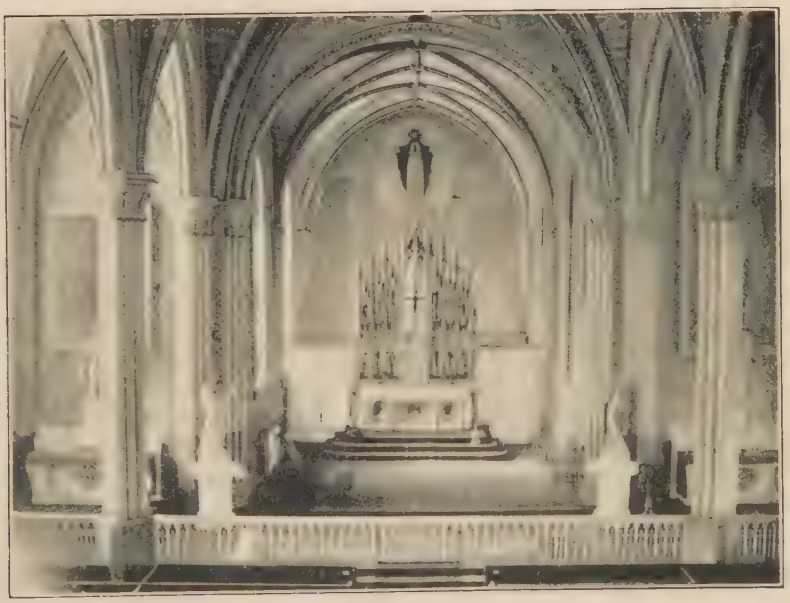
Naturally the labors incident to these religious exercises in the places attended from Saint Rose's fell to that community. In other parishes also the fathers gave generously of their strength. Although we have discovered no mention of him in the current accounts of the "spiritual retreats," etc., given for the occasion, there can be no doubt but that Father O'Brien took an important part in them. No priest was in greater demand than was he for such work; none more on fire for souls; none more ready to spend himself and to be spent in extending the kingdom of God on earth; none more zealous in the cause of Christ's Vicar, the head of the Church.

Yet no one could be more loth than was our soul saver to see himself emblazoned in the public prints for the work he had done. In his zeal the apostle always sought in every way to promote the good of religion; in his humility he ever strove by any means to prevent all mention of his name in the press. When not engaged in such labor himself, he no doubt multiplied his efforts that he might fill the places of his brethren in religion who had gone to the assistance of the diocesan clergy.

The jubilee was followed, in 1859, by an episcopal visitation of the Diocese of Louisville. Retreats or missions also preceded Bishop Spalding's visits to the various parishes. Again were the services of the fathers at Saint Rose's in demand. Again, we may be sure, did the herald of Christ do his best in aid of the good cause.

[5] The *Catholic Guardian*, Louisville, Kentucky. The date of the paper is missing, but the communication is dated "September 15, 1858."

SAINT ROSE'S CHURCH IN KENTUCKY. BUILT BY FATHER O'BRIEN.



INTERIOR OF SAINT ROSE'S CHURCH.

In the meantime, work on the new Church of Saint Rose progressed slowly. The debt gradually grew less. Finally, by the fall of 1860, the sacred edifice was completed and paid for; the debris carted away; the grounds put in order. As all this was largely due to Father O'Brien's tireless efforts, the description of the structure given in the *Freeman's Journal* deserves a place in his biography, although that paper's correspondent neither uses the best English, nor does full justice to the beauty of the church. Thus he writes:

> The beautiful parochial and conventual church of St. Rose, Washington County, Kentucky, is being completed, the scaffolding having been taken down from its grave and majestic octagon tower, on which there are eight pinnacles, with white limestone crosses of marble whiteness. This edifice is of the Gothic style of architecture built with chiseled blue limestone, and from its elevated position attracts the attention of the traveler, being situated in a rich and fertile country, noted for the salubrity of the country, and within one and a half miles from Springfield, Kentucky. The plan was drawn by Mr. W. Keely, architect. You enter the church through the tower—and to the gallery from which the whole interior of the sacred edifice appears beautiful and chaste—with its splendid organ, magnificent altar, tabernacle, and spacious sanctuary for the use of the Order.
>
> Within the enclosure are several beautiful walks for devotional purposes, diverging from the mound yard in front of the church. The mound, set with shrubbery, corresponds with the elevated and ornamental position the church occupies. To the church is attached a beautiful convent, with a choir and sanctuary, 44 feet, all built with the greatest stability and most substantial materials, and at a cost of over seventy-five thousand dollars. It will be a lasting memorial of the devoted love and pious zeal of the Rev. Father O'Brien, O.S.D., under whose direction and unceasing labor it has been raised, he having traveled far and near to raise the large sum necessary for its completion.[6]

[6] The *Freeman's Journal*, October 6, 1860. The common belief was that Father O'Brien expended on the improvements at Saint Rose's a much larger sum than that mentioned in the *Journal*.

One can far more easily imagine than describe the joy that filled Father O'Brien's heart at the happy consummation with which God had finally crowned his patient endeavors. But the zealous priest's happiness was increased by the thought of the greater freedom which he would now enjoy to carry the blessing of salvation to the people. In view of this he resigned the office of syndic of the community some months before the completion of his beloved church.

Through all this period, as in that which preceded it, the Christian knight's principal riding circuit continued to embrace Saint Rose's Parish, those of Saint Dominic's, Springfield, the Holy Rosary, Manton, and Saint Mary's, Harrodsburg, together with their dependent missions and stations. Not unfrequently, however, he received calls for help from more remote parts of Kentucky, and even from other states. Once at least he again journeyed up and down the Mississippi River from Saint Louis to New Orleans. Practically every year he passed into Ohio as far as Perry County, where his ministrations were eagerly sought alike by clergy and people.

Father O'Brien was partial to a gray or roan steed, for he believed that a mount of this color ordinarily had great powers of endurance. Indeed, only an animal of splendid stamina could stand the long and frequent journeys which the itinerant missionary was obliged to take. Thus in Kentucky, as had been the case in Ohio, he and his white horse were recognized at sight, whatever the distance from which they were seen, a circumstance that hastened, even if it did not occasion, the painful experience for God's faithful minister we have now to relate.

Some two miles from Saint Rose's there lived one John Jackson, a physician and a man of great physical strength. This doctor was a notorious bully. Often he beat his colored slaves without mercy. Not unfrequently, when in fits of violent anger, he treated his wife in the same cruel way. Although neither of them were Catholics, she finally consulted our ambassador of Christ about the outrages to which she was subjected by her brutal husband.

Doctor Jackson's barbarity was a matter of common knowledge; yet he was highly incensed because his wife had spoken to a priest of his cruelty towards her. While still in a towering passion, he descried Father O'Brien in the distance mounted on his white horse. The villain waited by the roadside. When the unsuspecting missionary arrived at the spot where he stood, Jackson sprang tiger-like upon the peaceful messenger of the Gospel, pulled him to the ground, and scourged him unmercifully with a cowhide.

To so powerful a ruffian the Friar Preacher could offer little resistance. When the coward had satisfied his wrath and ceased from his blows, Father O'Brien, covered with wounds and bruises, simply asked: "Why this terrible treatment?" The bully replied: "Because you advised my wife against me."

The reader needs not be told that this unpardonable attack on so beloved and inoffensive a man of God aroused a widespread and profound indignation. Non-Catholics were no less incensed than were Catholics. Indeed, if tradition be true, the general public were wrought up to such a degree that only the apostle's own earnest plea in behalf of his assailant saved him from

violence. Possibly the soul saver hoped to make converts of the doctor and his family.

Jackson, however, was not to escape vengeance from another source. He continued his cruelty. Not long after the incident just recorded, a son, returning from college, caught his father in the act of whipping his mother. So incensed was the young man at this outrage that he seized a gun, and shot the doctor dead in his tracks.[7]

God seems to have protected His servant from a number of other hostile assaults. Often, for instance, he administered to the spiritual needs of a Catholic family by the name of Anderson at Pottsville, about seventeen miles from his priory. The road thither ran near the home of a Mr. Hardin, a bigot who lived only a short distance from the village. Time and again this man threatened that some day he would put an end to the visits of the "popish priest" in that part of Washington County. He was a dangerous character. Yet, although warned of these threats, Father O'Brien fearlessly continued his ministrations.

On one occasion, when he espied the modern apostle and his white mount at a distance in the direction of Pottsville, Hardin grabbed his gun and started for the road, with the remark that this would be the last time

[7] James Jackson, a brother of the doctor, administered a similar punishment to Father Joseph T. Jarboe for advising a Miss Adams, a Catholic young lady, not to marry him. Father Jarboe's assailant was obliged to flee the county in order to save his life. Several years afterwards he was riddled with bullets by Union soldiers for dishonoring the country's flag. See the *Catholic Advocate* of February 6, 1847, and *Adam*, Memphis, Tennessee, April 16, 1887. Only a few weeks ago a first cousin of James Jackson's wife, now up in his eighties, told the writer the story of this attack on Father Jarboe. Until the end of his long life the venerable priest never neglected to make a memento in the mass for the unfortunate man. Doubtless Father O'Brien did the same for his assailant.

that the hated Catholic clergyman would pass his home. In spite of protests from his wife and others, he proceeded on his evil errand. Below the front yard was a thicket that skirted along the highway and shut it out of view from the dwelling for some distance. Here the bigot waited for his victim.

A little later, however, much to the surprise of those who watched from the lawn, the presbyter rode out from behind the copse, and calmly cantered on towards Saint Rose's, as though he had not been disturbed. No report of a gun, or other noise, had been heard.

When the would-be assassin returned to the house, he was greatly embarrassed. The family tried to learn what had happened; but his only answer was: "Ask me no questions. I have always heard that Catholic priests possess strange powers. Now I know it. Never again will I attempt to molest one."

Many later efforts to ascertain from this man what transpired at the encounter also failed. Neither would Father O'Brien reveal the secret. So the matter must remain a mystery. Our Dominican continued his apostolic visits to the Anderson home. Ever afterwards, when they met, his erstwhile enemy politely saluted him.[8]

Innumerable strange experiences, not a few of which are still remembered, used to be told of our Friar Preacher while on sick-calls at homes afflicted with mixed marriages. Protestant husbands, determined that their Catholic wives should not receive the consolations

[8] This intended attack of Hardin on Father O'Brien used to be spoken of quite frequently. It was referred to during a late visit of the writer to Kentucky. Among those who brought it up was Mrs. Frances Jaynes Rogers of Thomsonville. She knew the Hardin family.

of holy religion at the time of death, watched at the front door to prevent the entrance of a priest. Yet, when Father O'Brien arrived, they were so won by his gentle, earnest manner and kindly salutation that they offered him no resistance.

One such instance, because of the publicity it obtained, demands special mention in our narrative. It occurred on the outskirts of the Manton mission. A man by the name of Corbet had a Catholic wife. He had not permitted her to attend church, or to have the children baptized. Finally she became dangerously ill, and a neighbor notified Father O'Brien. The infuriated husband swore that if any priest undertook to enter his house, he would do so at the peril of his life.

When the messenger of Christ arrived, Corbet, a giant of a man, stood before the door to block the entrance. But at the words: "Good morning, my son; God be with you," he stepped aside, and stood as if frozen to the spot. Before the missionary left the home, he and the master of the house had become friends. The family soon entered the church.[9]

Nor should we omit another strange incident which belongs either to the present period of the Preaching Friar's life, or to that treated in the preceding chapter.

While engaged on Saint Rose's church, he approached a gentleman whom he had reasons to suspect could easily help him, and suggested a donation in behalf of the sacred edifice. The man protested that he had no money.

[9] Mrs. Edward McLain and others had fairly vivid memories of this incident in Father O'Brien's life at the time of the visit referred to in the preceding note. Mrs. McLain spent her early years near Manton. The writer's father, whose first wife belonged to the Manton parish, knew the Corbet family.

Father O'Brien then asked for a horse, which he could sell or use otherwise, as the occasion required. "But, Father," was the reply, "I have only the two that you see here harnessed to the wagon; and one of them is no good." "Well, give God this one," said the priest, pointing to the better animal. "He will look after you."

The good horse was surrendered, though quite reluctantly, and the pastor took it home with him. That night the man's barn, struck by lightning, burned to the ground. He lost his other horse in the fire. Early the next day Father O'Brien brought the animal which had been given him back to the disconsolate farmer. "Here," said he, "is your good horse. Didn't I tell you that God would look after you?"

There were those who believed that the Dominican foresaw the disaster that would befall this gentleman, and acted as he did in the interest of his soul, for he was notably careless about his religious duties.

While rector of Saint Patrick's, in Ohio, as the reader will recall, the son of Saint Dominic made many converts. So also did he induce many Catholics whom he discovered in out-of-the-way places to move near a church that they might practise their religion.

In this latter connection, we may instance one James Gallon, driver of a stage-coach between Columbus and Jacksontown, Ohio. The modern apostle met him when on a journey from the former city to Perry County. After a short conversation Father O'Brien learned that this man should be a Catholic. In his inimitable way the ambassador of Christ began at once to plan for the salvation of Gallon and his family. Agreeably to the promise which he then made to the zealous priest, the

coach driver soon settled in Somerset. There he became not a prosperous merchant only, but also an exemplary member of Holy Trinity Parish, and brought up his children in the fear and love of God.

Indeed, some of the most fruitful labors of the hunter of souls in Ohio were along these lines. Nor did he ever forget those to whom he was bound by such tender bonds of Christian friendship. On his later journeys to the state one of his first cares was to ascertain if they were still faithful in the practice of their religion. If he discovered that they were not, he allowed himself no rest until he had accomplished their conversion.

Two such instances seem to belong to this time. Both were men and converts of the missionary. One had moved from Saint Patrick's Parish to near Logan, Hocking County. Thither the agent of Christ traced him, and found him engaged in husking corn. No time was lost. He called the negligent man aside from his fellow workmen. A short talk was followed by a sincere confession in the shadow of a corn shock.

The other case offered the zealous priest more difficulty, as well as caused him greater sorrow. One of his beloved converts had forsaken the Church for masonry, in which he had attained the highest degrees, largely in recompense (so it was said) for his defection from the faith. In this instance our thaumaturge's troubles were increased by the fact that the backslider was of a proud and stubborn nature. At first, it seemed a hopeless task, for prayers, arguments and exhortations all produced no effect. But Father O'Brien gave neither God nor the unfaithful man any rest until he had accomplished his holy purpose. This second conversion was complete.

From the time he finished Saint Rose's Church, and resigned the office of procurator, the missioner's journeys in quest for souls became both more frequent and longer. Of how he spent himself on such apostolic tours we have a pretty picture in the sermon which Rev. Hugh F. Lilly preached at his funeral. When he had told his audience of Father O'Brien's extraordinary character, fidelity to duty and influence over others, the orator proceeds to say:

He was known to almost every bishop in the United States, and whenever he came within the limits of their dioceses he was furnished by them with a *carte blanche* to go around doing the good which they knew could not be performed by any other. It is twelve years now since I first saw Father O'Brien. He was travelling on a steamboat on the Mississippi River, and the manner in which he spent that as well as his other steamboat trips was truly characteristic. Should you go down upon the lower deck, after the boat was finally under way, and the crew had stored away the freight, you would be almost certain to find Father O'Brien in some nook or corner with one of the deck hands kneeling at his feet, and making his first confession since he had left his native hills perhaps twenty years ago.

It is impossible to calculate the amount of good which he [Father O'Brien] effected in this peculiar manner—it is known only to Him from whom he has gone to receive his reward. And his success, on such occasions, was as swift as it was mysterious. Where others would, in all probability, have been rebuffed with coarse jests and coarse blasphemy, he was generally received with kindness, and treated with reverence, for there seemed to be something in the very atmosphere in which the good man moved that inspired awe.

In this strange manner, in out-of-the-way places, and on out-of-the-way occasions, he effected more real lasting good than many a priest discharging the regular duties of his life. He seems to have had a special calling, and to have received special graces, which enabled him to look after and reclaim the lost sheep of the House of Israel.[10]

[10] The manuscript sermon.

This first meeting between Father O'Brien and Lilly, which was later to ripen into an intimate and lifelong friendship, took place in 1859. It seems to have been while on this journey that the celebrated missionary learned of the happy outcome of a previous effort for the reclamation of a fallen-away Catholic. The story, as we have often heard it told, runs substantially thus.

On one of his visits in the south Father O'Brien heard of a Catholic lady who had married out of her Church, and then ceased to profess her faith. This was enough to cause him to break his journey. He inquired where she lived, and left the boat at the landing nearest to her residence.

After a long tramp afoot, he finally discovered the woman's house. He reasoned and expostulated with her; but his words produced little effect. Yet he was not discouraged. Because of the late hour and the distance he would have to walk by roads with which he was not familiar, before he could find another lodgment, the Friar Preacher asked for accommodations over night. The lady's reply was almost a rebuff. Her husband, she said, had a strong dislike for priests. He was out, and she could not give her consent to the request until his return.

The man soon appeared, showing marked displeasure at Father O'Brien's presence. However, his southern instinct of hospitality gained the mastery, and he offered the wayworn voyager the protection of his roof for the night, though it was not done in a good spirit. When the ambassador of Christ arose early the next day, he found the household still hostile to his mission of charity. His prayer seemed to have borne no results.

Opening his hand bag, he drew out from its usual stock a catechism and one or two small books of religious instruction, which he presented to his hostess with the request that she would read them at her leisure. Then he took his departure leaving the unhappy lady to the mercy of God.

This was not the first time that the zealous man had met with so cold a reception, and yet in the end won his point. So was it to be in the present instance.

On his next journey to the south, Father O'Brien remembered his lost child, and paid her another visit. Great was his joy when, as he approached the house, he saw the husband coming to meet him with outstretched hand and a smile of welcome on his face. The honest southerner's bias was the result of ignorance. Curiosity prompted him to read the books which Father O'Brien had thoughtfully left at the home. These not only dispelled the man's prejudices, but likewise brought him the gift of faith. Our Friar Preacher now gave him further instructions, heard his wife's confession, for she also was a changed person, and received the family into the Church.

Nor was this all. The new converts told Father O'Brien of a Catholic family not far distant who had not seen a priest in many years. He then made his way to these unfortunate people, instructed them, and gave them the happiness of receiving the sacraments. Before he left the place, the American apostle exhorted the two families to bear their privations patiently, to encourage one another, to be an example for their neighbors, faithful in their prayers and courageous in the profession of their religion. He promised that, if they did this, God would bless them with visits from a priest.

In after years Father O'Brien had the satisfaction of learning that, largely through the instrumentality of the two families whom he had thus saved to the Church, a fervent Catholic colony had sprung up in a locality where, only a short time before, Catholicity was almost unknown. It was another instance in which the seed of truth that he sowed had borne abundant fruit.

"Truth is stranger than fiction", says the old adage. Even an Edgar Allan Poe could hardly imagine stranger things than those which often happened in the life of Rev. Matthew A. O'Brien. However, the grace of God that abides in His faithful servants is not of this world. It gives rise to unearthly things that can be understood only in the light of faith. But now our missionary was to bid a temporary adieu to his old familiar spiritual haunts, and we must follow him in his labors across the Canadian borders.

CHAPTER XIII

IN LONDON, CANADA

The first permanent hold that France obtained north of the Spanish American settlements was the site of the present City of Quebec, in the province of the same name, Canada. The date was 1608. Blocked by the English at the south, and urged on in part by the home land's race for dominion in the New World, in part by a thirst for gold, in part by a desire for the spread of the Gospel, and in part by their native spirit of adventure, the French looked towards the sunset. In that direction lay their greatest, if not their only hope of success.

Hardy trappers, hunters and fur traders plying their business, bold explorers bent on new discoveries, fearless missionaries in search of other fields of spiritual achievement, all pushed westward, threading their way through unbroken forests or along unknown water courses. In their wake followed pioneer settlers, who took possession of the land in the name of his Catholic majesty.

Farther and ever farther moved the march of the Gaul until it reached the head waters of the Saint Lawrence. Thence onward it went past the Great Lakes, and attained the Mississippi River. Down the Father of Waters it continued to the Gulf of Mexico. Along the route arose a chain of colonies, forts, posts and stockade

settlements, over which floated the *Fleur de Lis,* or the French flag, that formed almost a cordon around the English colonies on the Atlantic seaboard.

But the French at home were less wise than were those on American soil. The government of the mother-country failed to supply its possessions in the new world with the men and means necessary for their defense. Thus in the inevitable struggle for supremacy the brave Gaul lost in the game of conquest. This was in the French and Indian War. By one fell stroke, at the Treaty of Paris, signed February 10, 1763, France surrendered to England the immense territory of the present Dominion of Canada, and the great stretch of the United States between the Alleghany Mountains and the Mississippi River.

Chivalrous France, however, had retained her American possessions long enough to give us some of our most engaging and romantic history, whether civil or ecclesiastical. Everywhere the French fraternized with the red man. Everywhere they were accompanied by the priest, who looked after their spiritual welfare. Indeed, the object of their explorations was almost as much the spread of religion as the temporal advancement of the home monarchy. Missionaries brought the Indians together, instructed them, tamed them, received them into the Church. Rude temples of divine worship rose wherever these pioneers obtained a foothold.

Fortunately, in the Treaty of Paris, the English government covenanted with his Christian majesty, Louis XV, to leave the inhabitants of the ceded territory, whether white or red, in the free exercise of their religion. The Diocese of Quebec, established in 1674, embraced

all Canada and the eastern half of the great Mississippi Valley. But through the unhappy suppression of the Society of Jesus (1773), the western missions were deprived of a fruitful source from which they were supplied with spiritual laborers.

The clerical force was further reduced by the withdrawal of priests from their posts after the Treaty of Paris and Versailles, between England and the American Colonies, signed on September 3, 1783. Still another reduction was caused by the establishment of the Diocese of Baltimore, April 6, 1789. Raisin River (now Monroe) and Detroit, Michigan, two of the most interesting missions in the northwest territory, were fortunate enough to retain pastors.

Across the Detroit River from the city of the same name, but on Canadian soil, stands a village with the appetizing designation of Sandwich. It was long the central point of a French and Indian settlement. At the period of Father O'Brien's life covered in the present chapter, the language and national spirit of this little pioneer town led to its being made a temporary episcopal see, and to a change in the Friar Preacher's field of apostolic activity. For this reason, a brief outline of the early events connected with the Diocese of Sandwich will not be out of place in our narrative.

The limits of that see were visited by Samuel Champlain, the founder of Quebec, in 1615-1616. A tribe of Indians known as the "Neutrals," so called because of their abstention from the bloody conflicts between the Hurons and the Iroquois, then inhabited the territory. Rev. Joseph de la Roche Daillon, a Franciscan Recollect, also came within the borders of the diocese early in 1616, but he remained only a month.

Ten years later (1626) Father Daillon returned again to take up the labors which he had so suddenly left off. On this occasion he visited the home of Souharisen, "the chief of the greatest renown ever known among the Neutrals," a village situated on the site of the present episcopal City of London, Ontario. At first, he was received in a friendly spirit. The Hurons, however, fearing a loss of trade, if the Neutrals, through their missionary, should come into intimate relations with the French, soon aroused the superstitions of that amicable tribe. Thus Father Daillon was obliged to leave a mission that had held out good promise.

No further effort seems to have been made for the conversion of the Neutrals until 1641, when Fathers John de Brébeuf and Joseph Chaumonot, of the Society of Jesus, came into their midst. These two missionaries met with a fate similar to that of Father Daillon. But in 1643 this pacific tribe of Indians showed a better disposition. They even sent a request for the messengers of the Gospel to return. It was too late. In 1649, the Iroquois invaded the country, and destroyed all before them. Pestilence and famine, even more deadly than the tomahawk, followed in the footsetps of the fierce marauders, completing their work of devastation.

For half a century from the time of these catastrophes the territory that had been occupied by the Neutrals was devoid of inhabitants. Gradually, however, remnants of this tribe and of the Hurons, after many years' wandering, gathered at Mackinac. Here they were found by Antoine de la Mothe Condillac, founder of Detroit. In 1702, he induced them to settle near Sandwich. There, in 1728, Father Armand de la Richardie, S.J., estab-

lished the Mission of the Assumption, which has existed ever since. But the parish has been attended in turns by Jesuits, Recollects, Sulpicians, secular priests, Benedictines and Basilians. The last mentioned are still in charge, and conduct a flourishing college in the town.

The development of Upper Canada, now known as Ontario, was slow to begin. Late in the eighteenth and early in the nineteenth century, however, colonists began to flow into the country. Among them were many Irish Catholics exiled from their native land by religious persecution.

Quebec was finally made an archdiocese, whilst Upper Canada became a vicariate apostolic. This was in 1817. At the same time the government opened the interior for settlement. In 1819, Rev. Alexander Macdonnell, the apostle of Ontario, received his appointment as head of the new ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and was consecrated titular bishop of Rhosina on the last day of 1820. Progress continued, with the result that six years later, January 27, 1826, the Vicariate of Upper Canada became the See of Kingston. It is noteworthy that this diocese was not merely the second founded in Canada, but even the first bishopric established in a British colony after the so-called Reformation.

Meanwhile, Middlesex County, whose capital (London) was laid out in 1825-1826, claimed the attention of Kingston's ordinary. Thus we find Doctor Macdonnell, in company with Rev. James Campion, on a visitation at London in 1826. The bishop made the town a mission which he placed under Father Campion, pastor of Niagara, some one hundred and twenty-five miles distant. Not until late in the thirties of the last century

did London obtain a resident clergyman. But the pioneer town grew, was incorporated as a city in 1840, and in 1856 became an episcopal see. [1]

At that period London had a population of about 10,000 inhabitants, probably one-fifth of whom were Catholics. These had come largely from Ireland. The Right Rev. Peter A. Pinsonneault, S.S., appointed first head of the diocese, received consecration on May 13, 1856. He was a saintly man; but he seems to have been impractical, and to have possessed little executive ability. It would appear also that, born and having spent his life in the French *milieu* of the Province of Quebec, he was not happy in his new environment.

Accordingly, he had the seat of the diocese transferred to Sandwich, where he could be more at home among those of his own nationality and customs. This was in 1859. At the time of this change Rome instructed Bishop Pinsonneault to place London, with its single church (Saint Peter's), in care of a religious order. The Holy See further advised that an English-speaking community should be selected for this important spiritual charge. [2]

In the meantime, it would seem, the ordinary of Sandwich had entered into communication with Rev. John M. Bruyere, of Toronto, with the view of obtaining him as his vicar general. Father Bruyere had spent some years in Louisville, Kentucky. There he became

[1] The facts given so far in the present chapter are largely matters of common history. The rest were kindly furnished by Rev. Ralph H. Dignan of Chatham, Ontario, who is engaged on the history of the Diocese of London, and is an authority on this subject.

[2] Rev. R. H. Dignan as in the preceding note; Rev. William D. O'Carroll, Louisville, Kentucky, November 4, 1867, to Right Rev. John Walsh, Toronto, Canada (London Diocesan Archives).

acquainted with the Dominicans and their work in that state, when its church labored under difficulties not unlike those which confronted the infant Diocese of Sandwich.

Undoubtedly, it was at the suggestion of Father Bruyere that Bishop Pinsonneault's choice fell on the Friars Preacher of the United States for the charge of the Catholics in London. Through his vicar general-to-be, therefore, he began a correspondence with Very Rev. Joseph A. Kelly, provincial of the Dominicans. The prelate's generous offer was gratefully accepted. Thus Saint Peter's, formerly the cathedral parish of London, Ontario, passed into the hands of the sons of Saint Dominic, and became the first house of their Order in all Canada.[8]

Father O'Brien's talent for organization and genius for winning the good-will and confidence of people, whatever their race, religious belief, or station in life, caused him to be chosen for the delicate task of inaugurating the enterprise. With him were associated Revs. John A. Rochford and Hubert P. Ralph, both men of splendid physical build as well as of oratorical ability. Word of his appointment to this new position and field of labor reached the former provincial, so at least tradition informs us, whilst he was busily engaged in his missionary work. With edifying obedience he at once repaired to Saint Rose's that he might make ready for the journey to Canada.

[8]Rev. Joseph A. Kelly, Somerset, Ohio, August 15 and 27, 1861 to Rev. John Bruyere; same, Somerset, October 7 and 15, 1861, to Bishop Pinsonneault. The first two letters commence simply: "Very Rev. dear Friend." However, the context of the first, together with other circumstances, leaves no doubt but that it was written to Father Bruyere, who evidently opened the negotiations for his bishop. All these documents are in the episcopal archives, London. The Dominican Province of Saint Hyacinth, French Canada, did not begin until a number of years later.

Attachments on earth, when they are spiritual in character, are by no means incompatible with holiness. Such was Father O'Brien's affection for the Convent of Saint Rose, which he was now to leave anew. As he could not be certain that he should ever see the beloved place again, the last three stanzas of Doctor William Ray's poem, from which we have already quoted, doubtless represent the silent adieu that was in the missionary's heart, when he started for his Canadian home.

Saint Rose, if free from self thou live,
And charity to all shall give;
If unto others thou still do,
As thou wouldst have them, then 'tis true,
A richer harvest thou shalt reap,
Than treasures of the pearly deep;
For man still reaps that which he sows,
St. Rose!

Be Faith a guiding star to thee,
To duty ever faithful be,
From Justice never cease to learn,
The Truth embrace, and Falsehood spurn;
Let Love unite the hearts of men,
Till Peace shall reign on earth again;
Be these thy allies 'gainst the foes,
St. Rose!

Whilst thou art bold in righteous strife,
Whilst chaste and virtuous thy life,
Whilst with a free and lavish hand,
Thou scatt'rest blessings thro' the land,
Whilst from thy loving ministry,
Spring light and hope and charity,
Long may'st thou bide in calm repose,
St. Rose![4]

[4] See note 1 of Chapter XI, page 154.

The people of London, very naturally, were loth to see their home town deprived of its dignity as an episcopal city. No doubt, it was largely to compensate them for this loss that the Holy See told Bishop Pinsonneault to place the former cathedral parish in care of a religious institute. For the same reason, it must have been, Rome advised the selection of an English-speaking order for that pastoral charge. English was the language used by all in the congregation. Many, in fact, had no knowledge of French.

London's population, like that of the surrounding country, was composed of Irish, Scotch and English. In this way, religious differences and racial prejudices combined with the pioneer conditions of the country to produce some discord. Possibly, indeed, the lack of harmony had its part in Bishop Pinsonneault's dissatisfaction. Nor were schemers and rebellious characters wanting. These crop up everywhere, when an opportunity offers. Not a few neglected the sacraments altogether. Moreover, the church was burdened with a heavy debt.

Under these circumstances it would have been difficult to discover a priest better qualified for the pastorship in London than was Rev. Matthew A. O'Brien. Nature, grace and experience adapted him for the position. Results soon proved the wisdom of the choice.

Two weeks or more seem to have elapsed before our modern apostle was overtaken in his southern labors by the papers which notified him of this call to the north. But a letter of Father Kelly to Bishop Pinsonneault, dated October 15, 1861, shows that the missionary had then reached Somerset, Ohio, on his way to Canada.

It also reveals the provincial's confidence in his appointee, for he writes: "Rev. A. O'Brien, the bearer of this, is the Father selected as pastor of the church in London. He will receive any instructions your Lordship may be pleased to give, and will endeavor to carry them out." [5]

Fathers Ralph and Rochford had gone on to Sandwich a week earlier. [6] Thither, therefore, the superior hastened to join his brethren and to consult the bishop about his future charge. A baptismal record over his name at the cathedral, London, dated October 27, 1861, shows that he did not tarry on the way. Nor was he slow to fulfill the provincial's expectations.

No man, indeed, ever lost less time than did Father O'Brien. As was his custom, he set about his work at once. Without doubt he commenced by taking a survey of the parish, that thus he might the more quickly make the crooked paths straight, and the rough ways smooth. Even as early as November 27, 1861, Father Ralph could write to the bishop (he possibly did so at the request of his superior):

> I am happy in being able to inform you, my Lord, that our mission is going on prosperously. Many strayed sheep have come back to the fold, and a few even of the *black* ones have already shed their fleeces. There is a great deal of good to be done here; and, thanks to God, a little has already been accomplished. [7]

In a remarkably short time our ambassador of Christ healed festering wounds of long standing, reconciled

[5] Letter written from Somerset, Ohio (London Diocesan Archives).
[6] Father Kelly, Somerset, Ohio, October 7, 1861, to Bishop Pinsonneault, Sandwich (*Ibid.*).
[7] *Ibid.*

enmities that had existed for years, composed differences that seemed incapable of adjustment, overcame obstacles that appeared insurmountable, accomplished all manner of good for souls and religion. Still, a joint letter of Fathers Ralph and Rochford to Bishop Pinsonneault, of date December 27, 1861, reveals the fact that the enemy of man early sought to clog the progress towards peace and harmony through the instrumentality of critics and trouble-makers. [8]

But the apostolic superior threw himself into the breach. Under the spell of his pacific character no ill-will could long survive. The disturbance soon died down, and his own spirit of harmony pervaded the parish.

In his zeal and charity the new pastor went from door to door, seeking out those who were derelict in their religious duties. On the streets of the city he plied the same spiritual avocation. He visited stores, shops, factories, mills and foundries, and rode or trudged along the highways and across the country in search of stray sheep. Wherever they were found, he did his utmost to bring them back into the fold of the Church. Seldom did he fail. No place, however strange or repellent, deterred him, if only he believed that he might gain a soul for Christ. The church records show that he pried in every direction for children whose baptisms had been neglected. [9]

[8] *Ibid.* The author of this complaint is thus described in the archives: "He is at the head of everything that occurs to trouble the Catholic community in London." His views, we are assured, were entirely opposed to those of every practical member of the parish.

[9] Rev. R. H. Dignan, mentioned in note 1, supplied much data for this paragraph and the rest of the chapter. So too did many old people prove a helpful source of information during a recent visit of the writer to London and Chatham, Ontario. Mother Agnes Kent, a sister of the late Rev. John C. Kent, O.P., possibly deserves special mention.

The harvester of souls heard confessions in the same odd way, and exercised the same unaccountable influence over hardened sinners, with which the reader has become familiar from previous pages.

Father O'Brien always preached that the sacrament of penance is the sacrament of God's mercy and compassion for fallen man. Aglow with love of both God and his neighbor, faithfully did he apply the balm of divine goodness to sin-sick souls. So did his heart go out in compassion to ills of whatever kind. The sick, the poor and needy, the distressed, the sorrowful, the widow, the orphan, all found in him ever a patient listener, a wise counsellor, and, when required and possible, a generous helper.

"The good he thus accomplished," says one who has studied his life in Canada, "will only be known on Judgment Day." [10]

One or two examples among many will suffice to show how the man of God gathered in the backslider or the fallen-away on this northern apostolate. In his peregrinations he chanced upon an old man who had not even been in a church for more than thirty years. His most intimate friends did not so much as suspect that he had ever been a Catholic.

No sooner did the apostle discover this workman's early religious affiliations than he broached the subject of confession. Circumstances rendered it inconvenient and embarrassing to administer the sacrament then and there, as was his custom. After a brief talk, therefore, the priest said: "Now, my son, come to see me at Saint Peter's, Saturday evening. If you don't, I'll be back here soon to see you."

[10] Father Dignan's letter of February 12, 1922.

The man promised to do as bidden, and kept his word. The next Sunday early worshippers were amazed to see him not merely at mass, but also go to holy communion. He now became a monthly communicant.

The other example is the case of an elderly gentleman who lived at a distance from church. His family was faithful; but he never went to mass. Father O'Brien called at his home to learn the reason of his negligence. The man flew into a rage, and began to accuse first one person and then another of telling on him. The gentle priest abided his time until the delinquent's passion somewhat subsided. Then he said: "Now, now, my child, it's not a question as to whether anyone told on you or not. It is a matter of your soul and its eternal happiness. Come with me, and all will be well." The man's confession was heard in a quiet nook. Afterwards he led an exemplary Catholic life.

Our American apostle knew well that Catholics will not wander far from the path of rectitude, if they are faithful in the reception of the sacraments. Thus, as he had done in the United States, so in Canada he neglected no opportunity, whether in the sacred tribunal or in the pulpit, on pastoral visits, or along the streets and highways, to inculcate the practice of frequent communion.

Before our Friar Preacher's arrival in London the communicants at Saint Peter's on Sunday were only a handful; on week-days practically none. Under his influence and that of his brethren in religion the number of those who received the Eucharistic Lord on the Sabbaths and holy days of obligation was increased manifold; while not a few began to approach the sacred table

during the week. "He seems," says one conversant with London's history, "to have anticipated the action of Pius X," that has borne such rich fruits of religion and salvation. [11]

Nor was this all. Prior to the missionary's advent there, many seats were ever vacant in Saint Peter's on Sunday. Now it became necessary to build large side-galleries in the church in order that the worshippers might be accommodated. The congregation was metamorphosed; the former spirit of indifference and carelessness supplanted by one of piety, fervor and devotion. From all accounts, it is rare that a parish undergoes so great a change in so short a time.

The grandfather of the authority just quoted, who spent nearly all his life in London, used often to say: "They [the Dominicans] found the people baptized pagans and left them practical Catholics." [12] Whilst not exactly theological, and perhaps somewhat of an exaggeration, this statement gives a fair idea of how the Friars Preacher labored as well as of what they accomplished. None contributed more towards the peaceful and happy transformation than did good Father O'Brien.

Although he was not far beyond the prime of life when sent to Canada, for he was only fifty-seven years of age, the ambassador of Christ appeared much older. Ceaseless toil in behalf of souls had produced its effect on his frame, and in his appearance. However, he still possessed great powers of endurance. He retained all the fire of his former zeal, which perhaps explains an

[11] See preceding note.
[12] Father Dignan's letter of November 21, 1921.

agility which one unacquainted with him would not at all expect from his looks.

Mother Agnes Kent, an aged Ursuline Sister at "The Pines," Chatham, Ontario, knew Father O'Brien well when he was pastor in London. In spite of her years, she retains good health and a splendid memory. She described our apostle (so she called him) to the writer as above the medium height, lean and lank, angular in his features, awkward but quick in his movements, always negligently dressed but clean in both person and apparel. He was absolutely unpretentious. From his appearance a stranger might take him for no more than a farmer in moderate circumstances, for continual exposure had browned his face. He was much bowed, and looked an old man, in spite of his briskness. His hair was thin and gray. From under remarkably bushy brows glistened a pair of eyes that shone almost like diamonds. They seemed to pierce one through, and to take in everything at a glance.

The missionary was a very holy priest, Mother Agnes went on to say, strict, even stern, but at the same time most tender-hearted. She added, however, that his sternness, except for himself, was limited to the pulpit, whence he lashed delinquency to duty, evil deeds and occasions that led to sin. Yet his severest sermons breathed the spirit of a fond father. Elsewhere, in spite of his retiring and rather taciturn disposition, he was most courteous, nay, kindness itself. This helped him to win and to hold the hearts of the people.

There were in this herald of the Lord, remarked Mother Agnes, an earnestness and simplicity, an absorbing zeal for souls, and a forgetfulness of self so patent

that even the most indifferent could not help being touched. No one, she believed, could ever have heard our Friar Preacher, or have seen him at his work, or have come into contact with him, even in a casual way, and have afterwards forgotten the effect which he produced.

In Canada also, we learn from the same and other sources, Father O'Brien preached much and with extraordinary effect. Whenever it was known that he was to deliver the sermon, the church was packed to its utmost capacity. Among his audience there never failed to be almost as many non-Catholics as Catholics. All hung breathless on his words; none but felt the better for having heard him. Protestants held the earnest, sincere, plain-spoken priest in the highest esteem. Many of them became his converts.

In London the soul saver's practical judgment and knowledge of the ways of the world stood him in good stead in regard to the congregation's temporalities, no less than did his zeal and piety for its spiritual welfare. Once he had gained the people's good-will and esteem, he felt confident that he could depend upon their generosity. Neither was he deceived. The heavy debt with which Saint Peter's was encumbered quickly disappeared; the galleries erected for the accommodation of an ever increasing attendance at the divine services paid for. This gave the zealous pastor great satisfaction; but it was not all he desired.

Accordingly, Father O'Brien announced at mass: "A church without a steeple reminds me of a man without a hat. As no gentleman can be considered dressed, unless he wears a hat; just so, no church can be regarded as complete, except it has a tower." In their generosity,

therefore, the congregation must adorn the sacred edifice with a large, handsome spire. The appeal met with a hearty response.

When the tower was finished, the pastor declared, at mass again: "A church without a bell is like a mother without a tongue. Just as a mother cannot call her children, unless she has a tongue, so a church without a bell cannot summon the people to mass and religious exercises. Our church must have a *good* bell with a big, mellow voice to call the congregation to prayer." This request also received a prompt answer. The bell was blessed by Father O'Brien himself, and given the name of "Patrick Dominic"—Patrick in honor of the patron saint of his native country, Dominic in fealty to the founder of his Order.[13]

The next improvement that claimed the tireless man's attention was that of the pastoral residence. This he now remodeled. At the same time the grounds, an entire city block, on which the church and house stood, were put in order, set with trees, and otherwise beautified. Nor did the pastor disdain to soil his own consecrated hands with such menial toil, for it was in the service of God. On the premises there stand today maple trees which still continue, after a lapse of sixty years, to be pointed out as having been planted by Father O'Brien himself. A trivial matter this; yet it shows how long and fondly a faithful people cherish recollections of a saintly priest.

How systematic and judicial the modern apostle was in the arrangement of parish affairs may be seen from

[13] These homelike metaphors gave the people considerable amusement at the time. They also show that the missionary knew how to descend to the level of his audience, and to make them understand what he sought to impress on their minds.

the fact that the masses in the cathedral of London are said today at the very hours he determined in 1861.[14] This, however, is but another of the many ways in which Father O'Brien left an enduring impression on the Canadian city.

There, as wherever he labored, his life, style and toils still form subjects for conversation. His efforts were characterized by the same spiritual intuition which marked all his apostolic ministrations, and which seemed to enable him to read the soul and conscience of a sinner. His sermons, how they touched the heart, the good they effected, even to the quaint, droll expressions with which they were often interspersed, are frequently recounted as a part of Saint Peter's history.

All this has been handed down from parent to child, and from child to grandchild. As with the wise man of Scripture, so with this Dominican harvester of souls: "Many shall praise his wisdom, and it shall never be forgotten. The memory of him shall not depart away, and his name shall be in request from generation to generation." [15]

Under perfect self-control though he ever was, and not easily provoked, it would seem that on one occasion the Dominican Friar's patience was tested almost to the breaking point. It was the result of a practical joke.

One of the younger priests, so the story goes, visited an elderly Irish woman who was negligent about her religious duties, and expostulated with her for the delinquency. "Oh, Father," said she, "I'm so troubled with corns and bunions I can't go to mass." "Well,

[14] Father Dignan's letter of November 21, 1921.
[15] *Ecclesiasticus*, XXXIX, 12-18.

now," replied the priest, in a spirit of jest, "would you really like to be cured? If you do, just go and have Father O'Brien recite his office that your corns and bunions may be taken away."

The old lady did as she was bidden, and found Father O'Brien in the sacristy, likely preparing to say mass, or on his way to the confessional. When she asked him to recite the divine office that her feet might be cured, the curious and unexpected request, especially at such a time, so aggravated him that words were heard in the church somewhat to this effect: "Go along with you, my good woman! Do you think I have nothing more important to do than to read my breviary for corns and bunions?"

The holy man, however, soon regained his composure. Yet, needless to say, no similar jokes were afterwards perpetrated. The encounter, though perhaps a little disagreeable at first, proved fortunate for her ladyship. It gave the hunter of souls information which he used much to her spiritual betterment.

Our Friar Preacher's dream was the service of God and the salvation of his fellowman. Thus in Canada also he sedulously fostered vocations, doubtless hoping that the young men whom he took under his care might return and advance the cause of religion in the land of their birth. The Dominicans, writes Father Dignan, were the first to stimulate native vocations in the Diocese of Sandwich or London. The Province of Saint Joseph obtained a number of very useful subjects from it. "During the eight years they were in London," the same authority assures us, "they accomplished wonders." [16]

[16] Father Dignan's letter of November 21, 1921.

In the initiation and achievement of these good works, we know, Father O'Brien played a conspicuous part.

A subject to which the ambassador of Christ attached the greatest importance, and which was ever uppermost in his mind, was the Christian instruction of the young. Thus for the outlying country districts of the parish of London he seems to have established catechetical centers along the same lines as those which the reader has seen in Saint Patrick's congregation, Perry County, Ohio.

In the City of London itself he found a select school conducted by the Ladies of the Sacred Heart, when he assumed the pastorate there. But works of charity and benevolence in which the missionary was keenly interested did not fall within the sphere of these good sisters' activity. Nor did their numbers permit them properly to superintend the education of the many poor Catholic children in the town. In those days our sisterhoods, as a rule, confined themselves rather scrupulously to the instruction of girls. Thus the boys of the parish mostly attended either private institutes or the public schools.

Father O'Brien, therefore, soon began to lay plans for the various charitable and educational institutions which he felt would greatly aid the cause of religion in the City of London, even if they were not imperatively demanded for its advancement. These were an orphanage, a hospital, a school for the poor girls unable to attend the academy of the Ladies of the Sacred Heart, and another for the Catholic boys generally. All these enterprises he would place in charge of religious orders. Catholic education he considered so important that he was wont to call the parochial school "the sanctuary of the church."

Accordingly, with the ordinary's approval, the earnest pastor journeyed to New York in search of Christian Brothers for the education of his beloved boys. While in the great American metropolis, he also sought to obtain Sisters of Charity (the Daughters of Mother Seton) that they might take charge of the orphanage, hospital and poor girls' school. But so many of these nuns were engaged as nurses in the Civil War that the community could spare no members to open a house in Canada. Father O'Brien, therefore, returned to London by way of Hamilton, Ontario. There he laid his pious projects before the Sisters of Saint Joseph, and received promises of help.

This seems to have been late in the summer of 1862.[17] The following spring a plot of ground, whereon to begin the three last named enterprises, was secured near the church. It lay a little to the east of Talbot Street, fronted on the north side of Market (now Albert) Street eighty-two feet, and extended back two hundred and forty feet. Money was also secured with which to commence the structures.[18] The boys' school and the residence for the brothers, it would appear, were to be erected on the church property.

At this juncture, some began to fear that "the indefatigable zeal of Father O'Brien" for the poorer classes might injure the select school which was already in existence. Father Rochford, in fact, wrote a mild protest to Bishop Pinsonneault.[19] On hearing that

[17] Rev. John A. Rochford, London, "Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross" (September 14), 1862, to Bishop Pinsonneault, Sandwich (London Diocesan Archives).

[18] Discharged mortgage to Ephraim J. Parke, dated June 27, 1863 (Archives of Saint Joseph's Province, Somerset, Ohio); registers 2321 and 2322 (both dated June 27, 1863) in the Registry Office, London, Ontario.

[19] Father Rochford, London, July 22, 1863, to Bishop Pinsonneault, Sandwich (London Diocesan Archives).

unfavorable representations of his project had been made to the head of the diocese, the pastor wrote:

London, 28 July, 1863.

Right Rev. Doctor Pinsonneault,
Sandwich.

My Lord:—

I understand that some information not altogether correct has been conveyed to your Lordship in regard to the orphan asylum which we contemplate, and I therefore take the liberty of addressing you in order to remove any misapprehension on the subject.

In the first place, with reference to the ground, I was aware of your Lordship's wishes, and never had any intention of building the asylum on church property. On the contrary, we have purchased a suitable lot on Market Street not five minutes' walk from the church; and it is there we think of building.

Secondly, with regard to Mount Hope, nothing can be farther from our wish or intention than to do anything that would injure that admirable institution, even undesignedly; and your Lordship met the apprehended difficulties at our first interview, when you informed me that you did not wish to see any other select school established here than the one under the charge of the Ladies of the Sacred Heart. I have always borne this in mind, and in the contemplated orphan asylum my idea has been to provide, in the first place, for the orphans; next, for the sick and infirm; and in the third place, for the instruction of the ignorant, especially servants and poor children.

And if objection be made to the Sisters whom it was intended to bring from Hamilton, I am quite willing to meet your Lordship's wishes in that respect, as I am not so thoroughly committed to those Sisters that I am obliged to have them. On the contrary, when I visited New York for the purpose of securing Christian Brothers, I also endeavored to obtain Sisters of Charity; but they were not to be had on account of the war. Perhaps, however, I may be able to get them at Pittsburgh, if your Lordship wishes. At any rate, the Sisters of Hamilton are quite aware that objection may be taken to them, as I carefully informed them that Sisters of Charity would be preferred, if they could be had.

Trusting that these explanations may be satisfactory to your Lordship, and that you will see how unfounded are the affirmations of injury being done to Mount Hope, I remain your Lordship's most humble servant in Christ.

M. A. O'Brien, O.S.D. [20]

Doubtless it was the call which the modern apostle soon received to another field of labor that prevented him from putting these pious and beneficial projects into execution. It was unfortunate, but God willed it so. Nor did his brethren, although they later erected a brick residence for the Christian Brothers, remain to see the realization of these plans. [21] Bishop Pinsonneault resigned his see at the end of 1866. Late in the next year Rev. John Walsh, of Toronto, was appointed his successor. He saw at once that London, not Sandwich, was the logical place for the episcopal seat.

Accordingly, even before his consecration, the new prelate entered into negotiations with the Dominican provincial for a transfer of Saint Peter's to him for his cathedral. This was done, and the Friars Preacher withdrew from London in January, 1868.[22] The Christian Brothers never came to the city. But Sisters of Saint Joseph soon arrived from Toronto, took possession of

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] Father Dignan's manuscript.

[22] Right Rev. John Walsh, Toronto, Canada, October 28, 1867, to Rev. William D. O'Carroll, Louisville, Kentucky (Archives of Saint Joseph's Priory, Somerset, Ohio); Father O'Carroll, Louisville, November 4, 1867, to Bishop-elect Walsh, Toronto (London Diocesan Archives; also a copy of same, in O'Carroll's handwriting, in Archives of Saint Joseph's Priory); Father Dignan's manuscript. The last record of the Dominicans at Saint Peter's is dated January 12, 1868. The article of conveyance of Saint Peter's Church, etc., to the Dominicans (Registrar's Office, London) shows that it was a lease from the Roman Catholic Corporation of the Diocese of Sandwich for nine hundred and ninety-nine years. If one may judge from letters and other circumstances, the law of Ontario prevented an absolute transfer.

the house built for the brothers, and eventually put the rest of Father O'Brien's plans into successful operation.

Our missionary's labors in the northern country were by no means limited to the city and parish of London. He traversed the diocese throughout its length and breadth on missions and in efforts to bring the people nearer to God. On all these apostolic tours the ambassador of Christ met with his customary success in arousing the faithful to greater fervor and devotion. Sinners were brought to penance; conversions followed in his wake. As his friend, Father George A. Wilson, says:

> In September, 1861, he became the first superior of the new mission committed to the Fathers in London, Canada West, by Bishop Pinsonneault, of Sandwich. The improvement of the church, the missions given in almost every parish of the diocese by Father O'Brien and his companions; his untiring zeal and great success in this mission, during the two years he was superior, are only a part of his usual history. [23]

Though "always in delicate health," the same authority tells us, the Friar Preacher was "undismayed by the appalling hardships of western missionary life," and labored on "with untiring zeal, and with almost unparalleled success." In this way, albeit he had a wiry constitution, undue exposure in the more rigorous climate of the north combined with ceaseless toil to undermine his strength more and more.

Some time late in the summer or early in the fall of 1863, therefore, Father O'Brien was summoned from London. Still another reason for his recall was the Civil War. Kentucky was in the throes of the great strife.

[23] The *Freeman's Journal*, February 4, 1871.

FATHER O'BRIEN AS HE APPEARED
IN CANADA.

The authorities felt that the presence of such an apostle at Saint Rose's would do much good among the soldiers in the state, as well as contribute greatly towards calming troubled minds.

CHAPTER XIV

A MULTIPLICITY OF LABORS

The document which we now lay before the reader, by way of an introduction to the present chapter, repeats things, it is true, that have already been told by others. Yet, apart from its own inherent interest, it furnishes further proof of the veneration in which the modern apostle was universally held. So does it present new facts in his career, as well as throw not a few side-lights on his life.

Although the authoress of the missive, Sister Josephine Meagher, O.S.D., is three or four and eighty years of age, she looks and acts younger than many a person of three score. Her acquaintance with Father O'Brien dates back nearly a decade before the time of which we now speak. But her knowledge of him at this period of his life was acquired under more favorable opportunities. In several conversations she spoke of this, and in her letter from Springfield, Illinois, she writes:

Sacred Heart Academy,
May 2, 1922.

My recollections of Very Rev. M. [A.] O'Brien date back to 1854 or 1855, when he was stationed in St. Rose's Convent, in Kentucky. He enjoyed great popularity in and around Cincinnati, where I lived at that time. Rev. James F. Wood, the pastor of St. Patrick's parish, that city, but later Archbishop of Philadelphia,

was an intimate friend of Father O'Brien and an ardent admirer of his zeal and priestly virtues.

Often, especially during Lent or the time for Easter Communion, Father Wood had Father O'Brien visit his parish and hear confessions. These visits were always announced from the pulpit. The good word spread rapidly through Cincinnati; and people, particularly men and boys, flocked to St. Patrick's from every part of the city to confess their sins to the saintly Dominican. Indeed, so great was the esteem in which he was held as a confessor, many frequently put off making their Easter duty until Father O'Brien arrived. On these occasions he spent most of the day and not a little of the night in hearing confessions. The conversions he made among sinners were both numerous and extraordinary.

I have often wondered if ever a priest had a greater zeal or more effective way of winning the confidence of the people than that which gentle Father O'Brien possessed. The amusing and edifying stories I have heard of his interest in souls and his way of searching out stray sheep would make a big book. He never lost an opportunity of reconciling the wayward to God. He administered the Sacrament of Penance in every conceivable place—on the highways, in the fields, in private houses, in barns; briefly, wherever he discovered one who stood in need of the saving grace of the Blessed Saviour.

I might cite numerous instances of Father O'Brien's faithful labors along this line; but two cases with which I am intimately acquainted will show how he went about such work. While on a visit to St. Catherine's Convent, near Springfield, Kentucky, he learned that one of the men employed on the farm was negligent in his religious duties. Following this gentleman to the barn, Father O'Brien entered into a conversation with him. A few minutes later Mr.——, almost without knowing why, found himself on his knees at the feet of the zealous priest making an earnest confession. The change in the man's life, from this time, was quite noticeable to all who knew him.

The other case happened in Louisville, Kentucky, where Father O'Brien exercised his sacred ministry with a success which was no less extraordinary than that which accompanied his labors in Cincinnati. On one of his visits to Louisville he met a man in a store

whom he soon discovered to be delinquent in his religion. A brief conversation was followed by a sincere unburdening of the wayward gentleman's soul in a remote corner of the building. I knew this man well, and he never ceased thanking God for his encounter with Father O'Brien.

Father O'Brien was a most lovable character, and he had a marvelous tact which enabled him to induce men to go to confession in the most unconventional ways and places. His sincerity, zeal and kindness not only shielded him from all insult, but also prevented his efforts for the good of sinners from giving them the least offense. Wherever he was known (and that was in many places), men who had not been to confession for some time knew well, on meeting him, that they could not get away until they had ridden their souls of sin. Even Protestants are said to have often gone to confession to him. The good that Father O'Brien did through this part of his ministry will not be known until the day of the general judgment.

I would not call Father O'Brien an orator. Still his sermons produced all the effects of oratory. His earnest zeal and burning words never failed to electrify. I have often heard it said that frequently his sermons so aroused his audience that they stood up in a body in the church. Whenever it was known that he was to preach, large crowds always went to hear him.

Everywhere he was regarded as one of God's holiest priests, who never tired nor relaxed in his efforts to gain souls to Christ. Many believed that he possessed the power of performing miracles. Even Protestants regarded him as a most holy man and held him in the highest esteem. He made many converts from among these, as well as brought many, many negligent Catholics and sinners back to a faithful practice of their religion.

I had the happiness of receiving the habit of St. Dominic from Father O'Brien's revered hands on June 14, 1857. To St. Catherine's, where this occurred, he was not only a true friend but a veritable father.

Very sincerely yours,
Sister M. Josephine, O.S.D. [1]

[1] Sister Josephine was a member of Saint Catherine's Community, near Springfield, Kentucky, until 1873. But on the foundation of a new province of Dominican Sisters at Jacksonville, Illinois, she became one of its charter members. The mother-house is now at Springfield, Illinois.

When he left London, Ontario, there is every reason for believing, the missionary had no idea that he was so soon to sever his connections with Saint Peter's. But when he reached Somerset, Ohio, he received an appointment as vicar provincial over the fathers stationed south of the "Mason and Dixon's Line." Undoubtedly this measure was judged wise, if not even necessary, because of the state of turmoil which then prevailed in the United States, and because of the difficulty of communication between the two hostile parts of the country. [2]

In obedience to the voice of authority our traveller hastened southward. All went well with him until he reached Louisville, Kentucky. There he was not only halted but also arrested by the Federal forces in possession of the city. They even subjected him to considerable incivility. Nor was it without great difficulty that he obtained his release.

Tradition has it that it required all the influence of the Right Rev. Martin J. Spalding, Louisville's ordinary, to obtain permission for the vicar provincial to continue his journey. Southern soldiers made occasional incursions into that part of the state in which Saint Rose's, Father O'Brien's destination, is situated. Thus the northern army feared lest he might furnish the enemy with information that would be prejudicial to the Federalist cause. Another page will reveal how the ingenious harvester of souls afterwards availed himself even of the harsh treatment he received in Louisville for the conversion of an entire family to the Catholic faith.

It was not long, however, before our shrewd ambassador of Christ and the singular influence he exercised

[2] Rev. Nicholas R. Young was provincial at the time.

over others had gained the mastery. Then he could travel at will without being molested by the soldiers on either side of the fratricidal strife. Hardly, in fact, did he arrive at his old home, before we find him freely engaged in the exercise of his duties. To Bishop Spalding he writes:

St. Rose's Convent,
October 11, 1863.

Right Rev. Father:—

I have concluded to send the two young men that I have been speaking to you about to your residence for the purpose of having them ordained to the Holy Order of Priesthood. They have been duly examined, and their examination has given unqualified satisfaction to the examiners. It may perchance be some inconvenience to you; but I hope your Most Rev. Paternity will so far oblige us at St. Rose's, and we will be under many more obligations to you.

I would not be so eager about their immediate ordination, were it not that I fear that you might be transferred before the sacred ordinations could be given. They will leave here on Tuesday morning in company with Father Rooney, who is appointed to attend to them; he will hand you their letters of recommendation. I would like them to receive priesthood on Sunday, St. Luke's day, if you can arrange it.

Please comply with my request, and believe me your devoted servant in Christ.

Very Rev. M. A. O'Brien,
Vicar Provincial.[1]

At this time the Catholic soldiers in the southern armies were in sad need of chaplains. Thus Bishop Spalding, to whom an appeal appears to have been made in their behalf, writes his regrets to Archbishop Purcell that he cannot spare any clergy from his diocese for such work. But he adds: "I intend to urge the matter

[1] Louisville Diocesan Archives. The Most Rev. Francis Patrick Kenrick had died in the previous July, and letters were expected at any time transferring Bishop Spalding to the metropolitan See of Baltimore.

strongly on F[ather] O'Brien, Vicar Provincial of the Dominicans. I ordained two priests for the Order last Sunday." [4]

Doctor Spalding's letter is dated October 21, 1863. By that time, however, the vicar provincial for the south was on his way to Canada in order to settle his affairs at Saint Peter's, London, for his successor there. Whether Louisville's prelate afterwards made the request for chaplains which he contemplated, we have not been able to ascertain. Nor have we discovered any record of a Dominican acting officially in that capacity among the Confederate forces later than 1862. Possibly Father O'Brien felt that such an exercise of authority transcended the powers given him; or that, like Bishop Spalding himself, he could not spare the priests in the part of the province under his temporary charge.

But there is a tradition that Father Francis Cubero labored for a time with the Confederate soldiers. So have a number of old people in the parish told us, and it is also a tradition in the province, that the community of Saint Rose did yeoman's service far and near in the State of Kentucky during those troubled days. Rev. James P. Heaney, for instance, used often to regale his friends with his own experiences towards the end of the war. Among those who distinguished themselves for their work was the vicar provincial. [5]

In this connection, we cannot forbear giving a letter which belongs to the present span of the modern

[4] Bishop Spalding, Louisville, October 21, 1863, to Archbishop Purcell, Cincinnati (Archives of Notre Dame University). The two Dominican priests ordained by Bishop Spalding at this time were Revs. Bartholomew V. Carey and Thomas P. Faunt. This is shown by their letter of recommendation, dated October 13, 1863, and signed by Fathers Denis J. Meagher, John A. Bokel and James A. Rooney (Louisville Archives).

[5] Father Joseph T. Jarboe was a chaplain with the Confederate soldiers until his capture at the Battle of Pittsburg Landing, or Shiloh, April 6-7, 1862. Fathers John H. Lynch and Peter C. Coll, then lent to the Diocese of Covington, Kentucky, gave spiritual aid to the soldiers of both

apostle's life, and shows the zeal with which he pursued those whom he had converted or brought into the Church. It was written to E. O. Walker, commonly known by his second given name of Oscar, a Confederate soldier then a prisoner at Camp Douglas, Chicago. He was a convert of Father O'Brien. The document reads:

St. Rose's,
December 5th, 1863.

Dear Friend:

I know you will feel glad to hear from one who looks to your welfare with such interest. For this reason, I do not hesitate to say a few words to you. It is my purpose, dear Eugene, to give you a few words of encouragement. I feel assured you will deeply appreciate any advice coming from one who can have no other interest at heart but your eternal salvation. In order that it may afford you some consolation, I take it upon myself to say a few words to you on this all-important subject.

Our salvation is the only real end for which we were created; and if we fail to attain it, in vain have we lived. Then, my dear child, live according to the teaching of our most holy religion. Study its doctrine, and prepare to receive, with proper dispositions, the most holy sacraments. Fulfill all your religion requires of you.

Death continually stares us in the face, especially when leading the life of a soldier. See how suddenly your dear brother was cut off. Such too may be your case. At least profit by the lesson it teaches you, so that you may be prepared for such an emergency. Perform your duty faithfully towards God, and you need not fear death.

Receive the blessing of a dear friend, and be so kind as to send me a few lines.

Yours affectionately,
Father M. A. O'Brien.[6]

armies, in and around Lexington, from the fall of 1861 to the summer of 1863. The fathers stationed at Memphis, Tennessee, served the soldiers of both sides, as the occasion offered, in the western portion of that state; while Fathers Samuel L. Montgomery, Joseph A. Kelly, and John T. Nealis did the same in and around Nashville and Chattanooga. Father Constantine L. Egan was a regular chaplain in the northern armies.

[6] Letter furnished by Mrs. Mattie McIvoy Walker, widow of the addressee.

The southern forces, it is true, were soon driven from that part of the country. Still there was occasional guerrilla warfare in the Diocese of Louisville. Besides, as is always the case under similar circumstances, the upset condition of the times and the minds of men, together with the numbers of sick, wounded, prisoners, etc., multiplied the duties of the clergy, as well as rendered them more trying and difficult.

Father O'Brien, ever forgetful of self even to the neglect of his health, increased his efforts to meet the needs with which he was confronted on every side. He almost lived on the back of his old white ex-army horse, which is described as gaunt and rawboned, but tough as iron.

In this sort of work the soul saver met with his usual success. Furthermore, from this time he enjoyed greater freedom for the labor which appealed to him with a special force, and for which he was peculiarly adapted. We refer, of course, to the apostolate of reclaiming negligent or fallen-away Catholics and winning over those not of the fold. Of his fitness for this Christ-like toil we have further illustration in a letter to the writer from the late Father James B. McGovern, of Benicia, California. Under date March 1, 1908, the venerable priest writes, in the fulness of his early reminiscences:

> Of our own old Father O'Brien I heard much, but saw little. Less than a week, in November, 1863, in London, Canada, was my longest intimate sojourn with him. But only once to see him, and hear him, and have the slightest dealings with him would instance what a competent [critic] said of Archbishop Hughes: "Should a stranger meet him but a few moments under a tree in a shower of rain, he would be impressed with the extraordinary greatness

of the man." Meekness, politeness, affability, consideration manifested towards all, young or old, poor or rich, friend or stranger, or, if possible, known enemy to his calling and profession. For himself, personally, the most bigoted in religion could but feel and express admiration.

After this meed of praise for the noted missionary, Father McGovern speaks of things that have been made known to the reader earlier in the volume, on some of which his recollections do not appear to have been exact. He also mentions an old story concerning Matthew O'Brien's treatment when a layman by one of his relatives, at the time of his first visit in New Orleans. It tells us that his uncle refused to recognize him because of his poverty and gawky, uncouth appearance.

We think, however, that this tale may safely be discarded as altogether fanciful. We have often heard it, investigated it, and found it to be not only without any apparent foundation, but even irreconcilable with the real thread of his life. In after years, the Dominican priest and his relations in New Orleans were united by the strongest bonds of friendship and affection. When laboring in the far south, he never neglected to pay them a visit. Our correspondent himself remarks: "For this story I do not vouch." But continuing, he says of Father O'Brien:

His entering the Dominican Order and his ordination to the priesthood are, of course, dated in St. Rose's register.[7] Some years of his early ministrations were spent at St. Patrick's Church, near Junction City, Perry County, Ohio, where he built a fine Gothic brick church; as also, later, he built the present church at St.

[7] Unfortunately this is not the case.

Rose's, near Springfield, Kentucky. In London, Canada, he vastly improved the church properties. But his chosen field of labor, wherever his lot, was in seeking out the negligent or the entirely fallen-away Catholics, working up conversions, and instructing and receiving converts into the Church.

He was betimes procurator, novice master, perhaps prior, surely Provincial from 1850 to 1854. Throughout his whole career he was a man of prayer, intensely zealous for the success of every good work of religion. He was most devoted, and patient and prudent and merciful in the work of the confessional.

As a preacher he was impressive. His language plain, intelligible to the mere child. His figures and illustrations by examples, from the commonest things of every-day [life], were homethrusts—were specimens of the sublimest eloquence, always hitting the nail on the head. His delivery animated and pathetic. The universal estimation of his holiness, and God's blessing upon his humble, earnest efforts, brought success to his preaching.

To all acquainted with Father O'Brien it was evident that he practiced in a high degree the virtues theological, cardinal, and those of his religious state and priestly calling. In all his functions as a religious and priest most observant, towards himself austere, to others indulgent, so far as compatible with requirements. Among his many characteristical traits earnestness, industry and tact were conspicuous. His height more than medium; his shoulders stooped; his form thin; his complexion, to his latest age, florid; his eyes blue; his demeanor, bearing, look and voice most winning.

Not only did everyone love and revere him; but everyone, even of his shortest acquaintance, felt oneself a specially beloved of him. No wonder of his power over souls. Now, in reading these lines, you can read between the lines, and supplement much of their deficiency in detail and in expression . . . Any further information, within my range of knowledge, I shall be most happy, on application, to furnish. [8]

[8] Father McGovern was received into the Order by Father O'Brien when provincial. McGovern had an extraordinary memory. In 1872, he was assigned to the California Province, where (at Benicia) the writer lived with him for five years. He died on September 21, 1918, aged nearly eighty-two years.

Unfortunately, no further attempt was made to obtain additional information on the subject of our narrative from a source which might well have yielded many facts of much interest. But from this period of Father O'Brien's life, because nearer to our own day, the traditions about him are at once more numerous and more vivid; though documents, always scarce, are fewer. Beginning with 1864, and on to the very end of his career, the Preaching Friar was largely an itinerant missionary.

For the next three years or more Kentucky remained the principal field of the apostle's labors. With these were interspersed journeys into Ohio and tours through more distant parts of the country. From Saint Rose's as a center again and again he roamed over the missions attended by the fathers of that institution. In 1865, however, the Pleasant Run district and Harrodsburg, together with its stations, were turned over to the care of the diocesan clergy. These were followed by the surrender of Holy Rosary, Manton, in 1866.[9] But by this time the man of God had found a new sphere of activity in the same state.

Despite the Friar Preacher's years, this was indeed a time given to the most intense exercise of the sacred ministry. Unmindful of his advanced age and declining strength (perhaps, in his zeal, even unconscious of them), Father O'Brien spent himself and was spent in the cause of religion; he preached incessantly; he heard confessions any and everywhere; he reformed sinners, and brought the negligent back to a practice of their

[9] The Diocese of Louisville was gradually becoming better supplied with priests. Thus Saint Rose's gave up its outlying missions one by one in order that the Fathers might take up other work more in accord with the spirit of their institute.

duties; he made converts to the Church; he instructed these for baptism, and prepared neglected Catholics for their first Communion; he inculcated the practice of frequently approaching the Lord's table; he aided the poor, visited and consoled the sick, the sorrowful and the afflicted.

Not merely did the subject of our narrative revere Bishop Edward D. Fenwick; he likewise sought to imitate him. The characters of the two harvesters of souls were kindred. It is for this reason, perhaps, that the labors of the modern apostle at this time remind one so strongly of the last years of Cincinnati's saintly ordinary.

The early Dominicans of Ohio and Kentucky adopted the dialogue for propounding Christian doctrine. Father Fenwick initiated the practice. It was used especially for the sake of non-Catholics. One priest asked questions, or proposed objections against the Church; another answered them. Father O'Brien and some of his brethren continued this method of instruction for many years. In default of a clergyman, he frequently selected an intelligent layman to take the part of antagonist.

On the missions and in the parishes attended from Saint Rose's our seeker of souls employed this system as often as he could have a priest accompany him. He found it a great help in enlightening those not of the fold. The old people of Washington County still speak of the dialogue discussions between him and Father George A. Wilson during the period covered by the present chapter. They created an interest that always brought large crowds, and were the means of dispelling

many erroneous opinions about the Church and her doctrine.

Because of his age and other occupations, one is surprised to see Father O'Brien designated again for the office of procurator by the council of the house, and then amazed at the rejection of the choice by the conventual chapter. This was on March 31, 1865. The older members of the community likely sought to relieve the venerable priest in his apostolic labors by placing him in a position that would require him to remain more at home; or probably they believed that he could still combine the office of syndic with the toil of a missioner as he had done in previous years. Tradition has it that he sought to have another selected for the place, and that, when he failed in this, he used his influence more effectually with the younger men of the house. [10]

However, for what reason we do not know, we find the tireless worker in active duty as procurator only a few months later. He did not hold the post long. Providence, it may be, later placed him in the position that he might enjoy greater freedom for the commencement of the work of which we have now to speak.

Between Bishop Spalding and Father O'Brien, while the latter successively filled the positions of prior, syndic and a general missionary at Saint Rose's, there had sprung up an intimate friendship. But in 1864 Louis-

[10] The Council of a convent is composed only of those priests who have certain qualifications specified by the constitutions. The Chapter includes all clerics, even novices, who have made their solemn profession. In former times it was the prerogative of the council to initiate conventual affairs and to suggest appointments to minor offices, etc. But the chapter, to which the members of the council also belonged, gave the deciding vote. Today the vote of the chapter is practically limited to the admission and profession of new members.

ville's learned prelate was transferred to Baltimore as metropolitan of the first episcopal and oldest archiepiscopal see in the United States. More than a year elapsed before the "mother diocese of the west" obtained another ordinary. On September 24, 1865, however, the Rev. Peter J. Lavialle was consecrated Louisville's third bishop. For some years before his enrollment in the hierarchy Doctor Lavialle had been president of Saint Mary's College, Father O'Brien's alma mater and not far from his conventual home. Whilst there he became even a closer friend of our Preaching Friar than was Doctor Spalding.

Almost immediately after his appointment to our hierarchy Bishop Lavialle offered the province a foundation in his episcopal city. At the same time he requested that Father O'Brien should be sent to Louisville. Thus the former provincial had the happiness of seeing the Order finally obtain the place which, through untoward circumstances, he himself was obliged to decline eleven years earlier. Not only this. He became the founder of the new establishment.

The southern outskirts of Louisville were sadly in need of a Catholic church. Prior to this time Rev. Michael Bouchet, then a young priest, but later a monsignor and vicar general of the diocese, had been delegated to initiate such an enterprise. After a survey of the field he declared that it would be impossible to build or maintain a house of worship in that part of the city. Besides a small village of huts called Limerick, there was only an occasional house scattered here and there amidst commons, woods and duck ponds. The people in that district had the reputation of being the

roughest in the town. The suburb was malarial and unwholesome.

At the request of saintly Bishop Lavialle, Father O'Brien now essayed the difficult task. His keen judgment told him that, were a church erected in the locality, residences would soon supplant the ponds, thickets and goat pastures. Proper sewerage would remove the unhealthfulness, whilst religious instruction would soon soften the manners of the inhabitants.

With due authorization and in his capacity as procurator of Saint Rose's, therefore, he purchased several acres of land. This lay near the old "Plank Road," which was long Louisville's most popular driveway. [11] The ground extended on the southern side of the present Saint Catherine Street from Sixth to Seventh, and ran along these half-way to Oak Street.

Here our former provincial built the first church in the new section of the city. It was a little frame structure adapted to the temporary needs of the incipient parish. He placed it under the patronage of Saint Louis Bertrand, "the apostle of New Granada." Simultaneously he erected a school of the same material which did good service for some fifteen years in the cause of Catholic education in southern Louisville. Both edifices were constructed of lumber taken from a barracks and a small military hospital which Father O'Brien bought from the government. [12]

No sooner did it become known that preparations were under way for a church in this suburb than Cath-

[11] During the Civil War, and for a while afterwards, this driveway was often called the "Military Road" from the purposes for which it was then largely used.

[12] These buildings have now been supplanted by the splendid school, church and convent of Saint Louis Bertrand.

olics began to purchase ground for homesteads there. The earnest pastor gathered his scattered flock around him, reformed and tamed the wild and remiss, quickened all with his own zeal, and animated them with a desire for a larger and more pretentious temple of prayer than that which was in course of construction. At first, he said mass in a cottage rented for that purpose on the west side of Seventh Street, almost opposite the present parochial school. Later this house was relinquished, and another secured on the corner of Ninth and Oldham streets, where services were held until the opening of the little fane, in June, 1866, an occasion of great joy for the neighborhood. [13]

This work occupied much of Father O'Brien's time for more than six months. Meanwhile he lived at the cathedral, was the bishop's confessor as well as one of his trusted advisers, and traversed the city in every direction in his favorite pastime of reclaiming the negligent, reforming the sinful, and bringing outsiders into the fold of Christ. Furthermore, he co-operated with Bishop Lavialle in the latter's apostolic work—at times accompanied him on tours through the diocese, especially after Father Joseph T. Ryan came to aid in the organization of the new parish.

To prepare the way for the religious community which the provincial, Rev. William D. O'Carroll, intended soon to install, our pastor rented a large residence near Broadway. Its number was 345 South Sixth Street. Occupied late in June or early in July, 1866, this house became the first home of the Dominicans in the episcopal City of Louisville.

[13] *Dominican Year Book* for 1912, p. 46.

The founder of the parish now laid down his charge. Rev. Denis J. Meagher, who had replaced Father Ryan as an assistant in the enterprise, was appointed his successor. The new superior at once began work on the present magnificent Gothic church. But Father O'Brien had mapped out the plan and given the impetus. It was with unfeigned joy, therefore, that he saw its corner-stone laid on August 19 of the same year, and listened to the sermon preached by his friend, Bishop Lavialle. [14]

When the new establishment in Louisville had been thus set on its feet, the humble priest, it would seem, asked that he might return to his beloved Saint Rose's. To this, however, Bishop Lavialle would not consent. Thus the spiritual harvester continued his residence at the cathedral for nearly another twelvemonth, acting in the various capacities in which that prelate had used him previously, as well as a general missionary. It is in this way that we find him at Raywick, Kentucky, on several occasions within four months after the laying of the corner-stone of Saint Louis Bertrand's Church. [15]

To the present period of Father O'Brien's life belongs another of those incidents which aptly illustrate alike his zeal for the reformation of the negligent and the marvelous influence which he exercised over men. The story, as it was wont to be told, runs thus:

A young man in whom the messenger of grace had formerly taken an interest moved to Louisville. There he grew so careless about his religion that he seldom, if ever, received the sacraments—rarely entered a church.

[14] The *Freeman's Journal*, September 1, 1866.

[15] Rev. Martin P. Spalding's manuscript notes on the history of the province; Rev. Stephen Byrne's manuscript sketch of Saint Louis Bertrand's; and Records of Saint Francis Xavier's Church, Raywick, Kentucky.

Father O'Brien made many ineffectual attempts to meet this quondam friend, for the gentleman knew well what would be the result of an encounter with the harvester of souls, and fled at his approach.

But the earnest priest was not to be defeated in his search after his erring child. On one occasion, when he went to the store in which his spiritual prey was employed, the young man, as there was no other avenue of escape, dashed up the stairway. Father O'Brien followed. On the fourth floor of the building pursuer and pursued came face to face.

"Well, Father," then said the abashed young man, "I suppose I'll have to surrender at last." "James, my son," was the reply, "give me both your hands. You know what I want you for; and you know also that there is not a mortal on earth who loves you more than I do. Come now, go to confession, make your peace with God, and be a better man."

The ambassador of Christ then, with stole around his neck, sat on a box whilst the penitent knelt at his feet and unburdened his soul. A little later the two friends came downstairs side by side. Both were happy that they had finally met. Nor did the delinquent afterwards forget his promise to be a better Catholic. [16]

While in Louisville again, the modern apostle chanced to enter the notion store of James Stephens and Company on Main Street, between Sixth and Seventh streets. Here he met an employee who was from his own native town of Nenagh. A few brief words confirmed the fear of the seeker of souls that his clever

[16] Doubtless this is the gentleman to whom the *Nenagh News* of February 1, 1913, refers.

fellow-countryman had grown careless and remiss in the practice of his religion. "Come with me, my child," then said Father O'Brien, as he started towards the rear of the store. A short but sincere confession behind a pile of boxes resulted in a good Catholic life.

Bishop Lavialle's episcopate was brief. After his death, May 11, 1867, the hunter of souls returned to Saint Rose's, where the quiet life of the country always acted as balm to his soul. Yet the convent was no more than a center whence he sallied forth on missionary activities of every sort, whether in the parish itself, in more remote parts of Kentucky, or in other states. He could not repose as long as he was able to go and there still remained work to be done in the Lord's vineyard. The call of his vocation ever impelled him.

On one of his journeys through Saint Rose's Congregation the herald of Christ overtook a white boy and a colored man of his own patronymic; but they spelled their name O'Bryan. They were on their way to the grist mill. Following the custom of the time, each rode on a sack of grain which was thrown across his horse's back. The conventional salute, which with Father O'Brien always came from the heart, was followed by a few friendy words about matters of little or no importance.

Then, in his direct way—in anyone else it would have been rude—the apostle asked: "How long has it been since either of you went to confession?" "Well, Father, not *very* lately," was the reply. "Dan," the missionary now said to the colored man, "you ride on a little ahead, whilst Wat and myself talk about God. But don't get too far away, for I want to see you next." Thus the

confessions of the two men were heard by turns as they rode along on their sacks of grain by the side of the priest. [17]

Many things told of the Lord's faithful agent do not accord, we know, with the principles of agnostic and rationalistic philosophy. Possibly some of those which we record will receive but scant credence from the worldly-minded or those imbued with the spirit of commercialism. To our Christian faith, however, guided by saner principles and the brighter light of Catholic doctrine, they present no difficulty, if only they are supported by due evidence.

Our Lord Himself says of his faithful servants: "In my name they shall cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues. They shall take up serpents; and if they shall drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them. They shall lay their hands upon the sick, and they shall recover." [18] Nor are such happenings unknown in history. No valid reason can be assigned why they should have ceased with the times of the apostles. God has always worked wonders through those who serve Him in trust and simplicity.

Anyhow, the office of a biographer is to record the life of his subject as he finds it, not as he might have it to be. This he owes to truth, to his readers, to the person whose memory he would perpetuate, even to himself. He cannot, at his own will or because of preconceived notions, set aside as valueless and merely legendary whatever savors of the preternatural, or belongs to the

[17] We knew both of these men well, and often heard them speak of the incident we have just recorded. It is also still recalled by not a few members of Saint Rose's congregation.

[18] *Mark*, XVI, 17-18.

world of over-nature, for the simple reason that it does not fall within the experiences of every-day life.

Far be it from us to deny the wisdom, nay, the necessity of caution and reserve in the acceptance of marvelous stories told by a trustful but uncritical people. It is always well to act with care in such matters. This, in fact, is the Church's method of procedure before proposing any holy person for the honor and veneration of her faithful subjects. Yet, as has been stated, the reader will no doubt remember, "there are too many and too well substantiated traditions and extraordinary things told about Father O'Brien for them all to be void of truth and without foundation."

Through nearly all his priestly life the American apostle received numerous strange sick-calls. Not a few of them were positively unaccountable. From those which occurred in the time covered by the present chapter we select the following, and leave it to the reader to form his own judgment of their character.

One night, after the apostolic man had retired, he was suddenly awakened by a pull on the bed clothes. When he looked to learn the cause of the disturbance, the moonlight shining through the window revealed a large black Newfoundland dog which he knew belonged to an old lady who lived alone about a mile from Saint Rose's. The dog now began to whine pitifully. Our seeker of souls dressed at once, got his stole, the Blessed Sacrament and the holy oils, and hurried across the fields. The faithful brute accompanied him all the way, leaping and barking as if to say: "Hasten! Hasten!" Was the dumb animal sent by some hidden power? At any rate, the messenger of divine mercy arrived at the woman's

cabin just in time to give her the last rites of the Church.

Another strange experience in the Dominican's life is the case of an aged colored man, who had lately been liberated from slavery.

Father O'Brien was engaged in conversation with Mr. Robert Clements, when a strange negro boy hastily approached them, and exclaimed: "Come quick, Father, a man is dying up there in the woods." As he was some five miles from the church, the zealous priest had no time to go for the Blessed Sacrament. He and Mr. Clements, therefore, followed the black boy. When they reached the edge of the woods, the youngster disappeared, no one knew where or how. But in a lonely cabin they discovered an old colored man at the point of death. Father O'Brien just had time to hear his confession, which he made with every sign of contrition. [19]

The singular instance we now give regards a non-Catholic who lived in one of the distant outskirts of the same parish. His apostate wife, being very ill, wished to see a priest and sent for Father O'Brien. The husband swore vengeance against the missionary, should he come to the house. He went, however, heard the woman's confession, gave her the sacraments, and prepared her to meet God. The irate husband, to prevent just these things, had stationed himself at the front door of the house. There he was passed by the bearer of heaven's blessing both as he entered and as he came out of the home. Afterwards the bigoted man declared most positively that he did not see the modern apostle on either occasion.

[19] Robert Clements we knew almost from our infancy, and counted him amongst our friends.

So again, Mary Osbourn, a daughter of the Parker Osbourn mentioned in a previous chapter, was fatally stricken with pneumonia. The doctors had given her up. Father O'Brien was sent for. The family begged and pleaded that he would save the sick girl, for they had unlimited confidence in his intercession before the throne of the Divine Master. At last, he ordered all to leave the room.

One George Medley who was present, anxious to see what the man of God would do, went out of the house and cautiously peeped through the window. The priest knelt for a few moments in prayer, his hands lifted heavenwards. Then he rose, laid his hand on the sick girl's head, left the room, made for his horse, and hurried away. When the nurse returned to the invalid she found her well. In this connection, it may be noted that in after years the writer himself assisted Mary Osbourn, then Mrs. Badgett, in her last illness and prepared her for death.

Another girl of Saint Rose's parish is said to have become deaf and dumb through sickness, and then to have suddenly recovered her hearing and power of speech through the prayers of the saintly Friar Preacher.

Here we will lay before the reader the case of one of our own aunts, Mrs. Josephine O'Daniel, who was at death's door of puerperal fever. The doctors pronounced her in a hopeless condition. Father O'Brien came. When the tender-hearted man saw the large family of children, all still in tenderest years, he said: "This woman *must* not die." Then he ordered everyone from the sick room. A few moments later he hurried from the house, leaped upon his white horse, for he was

agile even unto his last days, and rode away as fast as he could. The sick lady was well.

At Saint Catherine's, near Springfield, this story is still recounted in the community. Sister Josepha was covered with sores that had long resisted all medical treatment. In her sufferings she finally had recourse to the American apostle. His prayers over her were followed by a speedy cure.

Nor should we omit an occurrence that is said to have happened whilst Father O'Brien lived in Louisville. For some reason Bishop Lavialle had him attend a spiritualistic séance. At the beginning of the exhibition the lights were turned low. Chairs and other furniture soon began to move. Father O'Brien then threw his Rosary on the dancing table nearest to him. The commotion ceased at once. Nor could the medium regain her power. So the séance broke up.

Whatever opinion one may form about the supernatural character of these incidents, they at least show that the ambassador of Christ wielded an extraordinary influence over the people, and that they had unlimited faith in the power of his prayers. This alone would not only justify their incorporation in his biography, but even render it peremptory. Without them, in fact, no sketch of his life could give a correct idea of the man.

If we make allowance for a slight error in regard to the missionary's education and mentality, the Hon. "Ben." Webb gives a true, though brief appreciation of his labors in Kentucky. The historian of the Church in that state tells us:

> A character among the Dominicans of Kentucky was the late Very Rev. M. A. O'Brien. Without any claim to strong intellectuality,

much less to brilliancy, and with but little claim to learning, and none at all to personal attractiveness in a worldly sense, it is doubtful if ever there was a priest in the State whose ministry was effective of results more wonderful. Marvelous are the stories told of conversions and reclamations wrought through his instrumentality. It was as if a child had been endowed with the might of an athlete, a weakling in reason with intelligence to lead aright the intellectually strong. [20]

With a keen practical mind and a fair education the modern apostle combined a childlike simplicity. It was this happy union of useful qualities, aided by the grace of God, zeal for good and forgetfulness of self, that enabled him to accomplish the wonderful results to which Webb refers, and which we have endeavored to lay before our readers. Of the Friar Preacher's natural tact and intelligence Rev. Arthur V. Higgins says:

After the expiration of his provincialship he was entrusted with many other offices of importance and authority. In all these his mode of government was characterized by the same practical ability. Nor should it be forgotten that his attention was at the same time distracted by other duties—that it was engaged in occupations of a description sufficiently absorbing to claim the undivided attention of any mind except his own. [21]

After the present period of his life Father O'Brien, although he still made his home in Kentucky, spent little of his time in that state. For this reason, a letter from one who knew him well nearly all the while he lived there makes a fitting closing for the chapter. William Mullican, despite his nine decades of years, still enjoys good health, takes a keen interest in the present, and possesses

[20] *Centenary of Catholicity in Kentucky*, pp. 211-212.
[21] The *Catholic Advocate*, February 4, 1871.

a good memory of the past. He tells his recollections as follows:

Springfield, Kentucky,
July 21, 1922.

I was born in sight of St. Rose's Convent and Church in 1833; so I remember Father Matthew O'Brien almost from the time of his ordination. Before he left Kentucky for Ohio in the early forties he had become noted as a zealous and tireless priest. The people of St. Rose's and the surrounding parishes loved him as a confessor and flocked to him for spiritual guidance. He was a most spiritual, kindly and charitable man. Protestants, among whom he made a number of converts, held him in an esteem in which they held few other priests.

In later years, through his influence, I attended St. Joseph's College, near Somerset, Ohio. There I learned that he was no less revered in Ohio than in Kentucky. At this time Father O'Brien was Provincial, had done much missionary work in the north, and was one of the best known priests in the Diocese of Cincinnati. The influence he wielded everywhere was really wonderful.

When he ceased to be Provincial, Father O'Brien returned to St. Rose's as Prior. It was then that he began an apostolic career that has, I think, few parallels in the history of Kentucky. I labored on the present church of St. Rose's which was erected under his care and direction. He traveled in every direction on missionary journeys. Day and night he gave himself no rest. His specialty seemed to be the reclamation of those who had fallen away from the Church, the reformation of sinners, and the conversion of Protestants. His success with such as these was marvelous. Few priests I imagine have ever done so much good in this way. Father O'Brien succeeded where others had failed. His attention was directed principally toward men. Something seemed to tell him when a man needed to go to confession; and when he met one who, he suspected, stood in such need, he generally induced him to confess sins at once, wherever the meeting took place.

In these cases Father O'Brien did not trouble himself about a church; the roadside or any secret nook or corner served his purpose as well as the confessional. The country people knew him as

far as they could see him, and if they had not been to confession for some time, they began to examine their consciences as soon as they saw him in preparation for the inevitable confession. Strange as it may seem, he never gave offense by this singular method of hearing confessions. There was something in him that won confidence, made one realize that he was working for the good of one's soul, and took away all sting. Father O'Brien's evident humility and zeal made you realize that he was a true priest of God, always on the outlook for the best interest of souls. Even Protestants realized and loved him for it.

By all Catholics he was regarded as a saint. They believed he could work miracles. In past years a number of wonderful things were attributed to him. When I think of his poor voice, his awkward appearance, and almost uncouth dress, I wonder how his sermons produced such an effect. People flocked to hear him and hung spellbound on his words. One could not imagine a more impressive speaker in spite of his simple language and his drawbacks. You were simply carried away with the man. This was after he came back from Ohio, for, if I remember rightly, he was not considered much of a preacher in the first years of his priesthood.

To the present day Father O'Brien is regarded by the people of this part of Kentucky as a model of every virtue and priestly zeal. His memory should ever be treasured by St. Rose's congregation.

Very respectfully yours,

William H. Mullican.

CHAPTER XV

A RESUME

Father O'Brien was a man of great concentration. Into whatever he did he put his whole heart. In affairs of the soul his mind was as penetrating as his extraordinary eye was quick to take in all around him. Nature endowed him with a rare fund of that good common sense which is often of greater value than erudition.

All this, together with the modern apostle's naturally quiet, diffident disposition, was in part responsible for the "short, pithy, epigrammatical sentences which characterized his conversation as well as his quaint sermons, and which never failed to leave a lasting impression upon his hearers." "I have heard him," says a very competent critic who came into intimate contact with him during the last years of his life, "in a question of five or six words throw more light on a difficulty than would be obtained in a half-hour's talking of ordinary men."[1] Herein also, perhaps, lay the cause of some of the magical influence which he exercised over others.

Still another factor in the power that he wielded was his greatness of mind and heart. He bore malice to-

[1] Sermon of H. F. Lilly. Nearly all this chapter, in fact, is a study of Father O'Brien drawn from Father Lilly's discourse at his funeral mass, the account of him in the *Catholic Advocate,* of February 4, 1871, tradition, talks with the old people, and what has been narrated in the previous chapters.

wards none. He was incapable of revenge or an evil turn. On the one hand, he paid no attention to a slight or an injury—did not remember it. On the other, he cherished every kind word, and never forgot a good deed or neglected to show his appreciation of a favor.

Not even an outline of a sermon by the missionary has come down to us. Possibly, after the first years of his priesthood, he wrote none. This is the more to be regretted, for no small part of the fruit borne by the Dominican's wonderful apostolate was due to his preaching. Through tradition, however, we know that, at least towards the close of his career, he seldom delivered a set sermon.

Experience no doubt convinced him that long discourses were not productive of the greater good, for the simple reason that the mind, like the stomach, cannot well digest its food if taken in overdoses. Thus our Friar Preacher ordinarily limited his orations to half an hour, a rather singular phenomenon for that day. Special occasions, when the audience was keyed up with great expectation, he made an exception to this rule.

Another truth which experience doubtless taught Father O'Brien, in common with others engaged in the same work, was that it is impossible in the brief span necessary for an ordinary sermon to speak in detail. He therefore contented himself with giving the bare outlines of Catholic doctrine. But his mastery of brevity enabled him to do this in the most instructive way as well as in the shortest time. The doctrinal exposé was followed by moral reflections, brief, to the point, and with a force that never failed to stir the hearts of his audience. After this came a pathetic and exhortatory

conclusion that frequently brought copious tears no less than good resolutions. The preacher's earnest appeals seemed irresistible.

Because of the important part which the ministry of the word played in the apostle's efforts to gain souls for Christ, we should like to essay an imitation of a sermon by him along the lines of some we have often heard described by those who lived in his day. But we fear the attempt. They were inimitable.

Suffice it then to say that forcible epigram, pungent aphorism and wise adage succeeded one the other in almost alarming rapidity. These were richly interspersed with quotations from Scripture or whatever else the preacher had read, all ever direct to the point. Father O'Brien was a child of nature. Thus truths of nature and every-day life were likewise brought into service for his sermons. They furnished him with many of his most effective home-thrusts. Anecdotes, events of history or of the time, incidents in the community for which he labored, in short, any and everything—for he was an observant man who suffered naught to go unavailed of —served his holy purpose in the same way.

The missionary had a rare gift of accommodating his sermons to the minds of his hearers. Ever and always he sought to place himself on a level with the country people and laboring classes for whom he so often preached. For this reason, he spoke the plain, simple language which they used. Yet, like the apostolic Pope, Gregory the Great, while he endeavored to make his exposition of the Gospel clear to the unlettered, Father O'Brien took good care that it would not prove irksome for the well-read. He succeeded admirably. All were equally delighted and benefited by his sermons.

As in conversation, so in preaching Father O'Brien never employed a useless word. Every sentence was brief, pointed and direct—the verb often left to be understood. Not unfrequently, in his hurry, he spoke by way of suggestion rather than by way of full expression. Yet no one could mistake his meaning.

Thought followed thought in quick succession. In spite of a slight lisp and a rapid enunciation, every syllable might easily be caught. Frequent side-lights and hints that came like flashes served to quicken interest in the sermon. An occasional droll or quaint expression, that at one time was the result of contact with the people and at another was used for that purpose, both amused the audience and emphasized an idea.

The Scriptural proverb, "In all thy works remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin" (*Ecclesiasticus*, VII, 40), the modern apostle made a motto for himself, and he sought to induce the faithful to follow his example. But he phrased the principle in the terms of Catholic theology: "Remember the four last things, and thou shalt never sin." Few were the sermons Father O'Brien preached in which he did not touch on death, judgment, heaven and hell. He did so with a force that stirred the hearts of the most callous.

On the one hand, he pictured the love of God, the glories of heaven and the happiness of eternal life in a way that made one long for them. On the other, he portrayed sin, an unrepentant death, judgment and the horrors of hell in colors that struck the evil-doer with terror.

Some months ago we told the Rev. Thomas A. Powers, rector of Saint Peter's Church, Steubenville, Ohio, but formerly pastor at Logan, in the same state,

that this biography was under consideration. The information pleased him greatly. Then he related how, when in his earlier charge, the older people of Hocking and the surrounding counties had often regaled and edified him with accounts of Father O'Brien's life, spirit and labors. The itinerant harvester of souls, he said, "was canonized in the hearts of all who knew him".

But that which, next to the apostolic priest's tireless zeal, appealed in an especial manner to Father Powers seemed to be how the people, after more than a quarter of a century, still remembered so many of Father O'Brien's sayings and expressions. This, he felt, offered proof positive that our ambassador of Christ must have preached with extraordinary force and effect.

It also gave the impression that he was a militant soldier of the Lord—a fighter, however, not of men (he was too universally and too deeply loved for that), but of sin and the evil influences that lead to sin. This, indeed, he was—a man of virile, Paul-like piety; and the thought of it inspired the following words of Father Powers in a sermon which he preached at the centenary jubilee of Saint Joseph's, near Somerset, Ohio:

> Father O'Brien is remembered as a hard-working, militant priest. Whoever loves an honest man, a hard worker and a good fighter cannot withhold his tribute from Father O'Brien. Everybody loved, everybody admired, everybody respected, but nobody could imitate him. As a preacher he had more regard for his message than for his rhetoric, though he knew both, and his message went straight to the hearts of the people, in their familiar style of speaking. Dr. Brownson, perhaps the greatest philosopher and essayist this continent ever produced, pronounced Father O'Brien the greatest preacher he had ever heard; and this judgment of Dr. Brownson is

borne out by the fact that more than any other his pointed sayings are remembered and still quoted by the people:

"Truth from his lips prevailed with double sway,
And those who came to scoff, remained to pray." [2]

The missionary's favorite ending for a sermon ran along these lines:

"Our salvation is the only real end for which we were created. This attained, it matters not whatever else may befall us; for all will be well. If we fail to attain it, in vain have we lived. Set your hearts, therefore, on the things of heaven, not on the things of earth. The world can give you nothing permanent. Be not solicitous about what you eat, or what you wear, or what you possess. You can take none of these things into the next life. Remember that the shroud has no pockets. After death what possessions will you have? A wooden box and six feet of earth into which you will be laid by other hands. Not so much as the memory of you will long remain on the earth. Sad, awfully sad, thought this; but none the less true for that!

" 'What will it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?' Nothing—absolutely nothing. He will have failed in the one thing necessary. In vain will he have been created. Serve God then, not the world. Devote your brief span of life on earth to His love and service. All else will pass away. He alone remains forever. Love Him; serve Him; be good; faithfully practise your religion. Then well will it be for you both here and hereafter.

"With my whole heart do I wish you this greatest of blessings in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

[2] *The Centenary of Saint Joseph's Church, Somerset, Ohio,* Somerset, 1918.

Whilst Father O'Brien delivered his discourse, profoundest silence reigned in the church. When it closed, there came a hush so intense that it was almost painful. But that which gave the Friar Preacher his greatest power in the pulpit, caused the people to flock to hear him, made them hang breathless on his words, and inspired them with a hearty contrition for their sins, was the man of God at the work of God. This is the verdict of all who knew him. There he believed himself a messenger of Christ, and therefore put his whole heart into every sermon he preached. One could see that the speaker meant every word he uttered—that his one thought was the glory of the Creator and the salvation of souls.

By the time where we left him for this study, Father O'Brien, in the performance of his priestly functions, had frequently traversed the United States from the Canadian boundary to the Gulf of Mexico, and from Pittsburgh to beyond the Mississippi River. The Atlantic seaboard had also been, more than once, the field of his apostolic activity. Few priests of the Mississippi Valley were so widely known, or so deeply revered, as was this humble Dominican Friar.

His fame extended from coast to coast. He had a personal acquaintance with nearly every bishop in his adopted country, all of whom esteemed and admired him—implicitly trusted him. It was for this reason that, wherever he went, the hierarchy gave him *carte blanche* to exercise his zeal in the performance of work which they knew few, if any, others could accomplish. The clergy vied with one another in honoring him. Previous pages have shown the magical influence he wielded

over people of every creed and of every walk in life. Indeed, the missionary's apostolic career was almost like a triumphal progress.

All this is the more strange because he had the simplicity of a child, and was utterly devoid of any pretension to learning. From popularity and show he instinctively shrank. Whilst affable and polite, quick to foresee the wants of others and prompt to anticipate them, he was of a reticent temperament and a retiring proclivity. He seldom spoke except when spoken to, or in the fulness of his zeal, or under the impulse of charity. Even then our Preaching Friar was a man of few words.

Yet few men could say so much in so few words as could Father O'Brien. This, no doubt, greatly aided him. Other helps were a clear mind, a well-balanced judgment and a marked prudence that told him what to do, and when and how to speak and to act. The silent man was by nature a practical psychologist. Perhaps of still greater advantage were a keen penetration that enabled him to comprehend at a glance the disposition of those with whom he came into contact, and a gift that caused him to read human nature as if by intuition.

The missionary had a marvelous sense of hearing. As nothing seemed to escape the eyes that fairly glistened through his shaggy lashes, so could he detect the slightest sound. When at the Convent of Saint Rose, and not otherwise engaged, he was scrupulously at his post in the choir behind the main altar for divine services. If he heard any unusual noise outside, he was on the spot in a flash to learn its cause.

More than once, of a Sunday, the watchful guardian of religious decorum thus surprised persons engaged in

conversation in the graveyard when they should have been in church. They could not be seen from the choir; nor did it seem possible for their voices, carried on in so low a tone, to be heard at such a distance. It was likely this that gave rise to the declaration, which one used often to hear, that Father O'Brien could see through a stone wall.

It is hard to conceive, much less to portray, the hardships which the American apostle endured, the trials which he bore, the fatigues which he underwent, the obstacles which he encountered, and the difficulties which he surmounted in the rough way of the cross that he marked out for himself, and followed with unswerving resolution. At that remote day horseback was the only means of travel by which he could reach many of the places from which he received calls, or which he wished to visit. Besides, even when a train was available, he more frequently than not chose to take his trusty steed. It gave him an opportunity of looking up the stray sheep of the House of Israel who might live along the route.

Father O'Brien's modesty combined with his zeal to lead him by preference into out-of-the-way places seldom, if ever, visited by priests, or where he could find the sick of soul who stood in need of his ministrations. "Where is the sense or the charity," he was wont to say in his simple way, "in surfeiting some with the good things of life, whilst you permit others to die of starvation? It is not he that is well, but the sick man that has need of a physician." He made light of every hardship, or even of danger, in his efforts to win souls for God.

In the same connection, the earnest fisher of men often asked: "Does not the word of God assure us that 'there

shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance'?" Another of his sayings was: "Our model should be the man of Holy Scripture who left his ninety-nine sheep to go in search for the one that was strayed away, and rejoiced when he had found it and brought it home." "Christ our Lord tells us," he would add, "there are other sheep that are not of the fold. These also we must gather in, so that there shall be one fold and one shepherd."

The character of some of the backwoods places into which the agent of Christ found his way on his peregrinations may be judged from the ignorance which he sometimes encountered. He came across people whose little knowledge of things religious would hardly entitle them to be called Christian. On one occasion he stopped at a tavern, in Ohio, for dinner. He deftly introduced the subject of Catholicity, which soon developed into a fruitful source of amusement.

All manner of opinions were maintained about Catholics, their practices and their doctrine. There was not one in the assembly but who firmly believed that adherents of the old faith grew horns and had cloven hoofs. Father O'Brien, with a benign smile on his face, remained silent; but he thoroughly enjoyed the various views expressed anent his religion. When he informed them, just before taking his departure, that he was a Catholic, it was with difficulty that they were persuaded that so nice a man, especially since he bore none of the bovine characteristics attributed to those of his creed, could be a member of the Church of Rome.

Whenever there was question of priestly duties, the

ambassador of Christ never paused to count the cost of their performance. Nor did he content himself with doing merely his duty. As long as there remained a single person who needed spiritual aid or comfort, he would not think of rest until he had brought such a one the peace of God. In a parish with several priests there are always odds and ends of tasks that belong to no one in particular. When Father O'Brien was at home, the lay brothers well knew where to go in order that such work might surely be done without delay.

Deeply ascetical, the zealous Dominican did not, because of ceaseless toil, dispense himself from fasts and mortifications. Yet, whilst severe with himself, he was ever the soul of gentleness and kindness towards others, as well as considerate and tactful in his dealings with them. His patience knew no bounds. He set no limit to the inconvenience he would undergo for even the accommodation of another. His heart was moved to its depths at the sight of misery or distress, whatever its character.

Nor is this all. Father O'Brien's life and labors caused his name to become almost a household word in Ohio and Kentucky. This brought him strange and unexpected calls from strange and unexpected places. They came from all distances and from all sorts of people—from Catholics who had not been able to practise their religion, or had strayed from the path of righteousness; from non-Catholics who were either doubtful of their creed, or wished to see what he had to offer in its stead; from persons of practically no faith; from those who, feeling that they were nearing the end of life's journey, longed to have their souls comforted and con-

soled by the man of God of whom they had heard so much.[3]

Never did the lowly Dominican turn a deaf ear to such calls. No distance, no hardship, no condition of the weather, no hour of day or night deterred him. When an appeal came, if at all able to travel, off he went at once in any way, trusting himself to providence, and prayed all the while that his efforts might result in the salvation of at least one more soul. The good that Father O'Brien accomplished on these strange visits will be known only in heaven.

Through continual spiritual jaunts our Friar Preacher became so thoroughly acquainted with parts of Ohio and Kentucky that he could almost make his way over them blindfolded. No huntsman or trapper could have known the by-paths and short cuts better than did this hunter of souls. Methodical in whatever he did, he took advantage of all these that he might save time in order to accomplish the greater good.

Nor should it be forgotten that, strange as it may seem, it is not uncommon even now for priests in portions of those two states to get sick-calls from persons baptized by Father O'Brien in distant, inaccessible localities. Living far away from church or pastor such persons had never enjoyed an opportunity to practise their religion. Yet, though surrounded by a non-Catholic—if not even a strongly anti-Catholic—atmosphere, the very fact that they had been baptized by the apostolic Friar Preacher seems to have kept them in the faith and caused them to send for a priest at the hour of death.

Our modern apostle seemed never less alone than

[3] Rev. H. F. Lilly refers to these strange calls in his sermon.

when alone. He saw God in all His creatures, longed to make Him known, loved and honored. To the praise and glory of the Creator he gave his spare moments in prayer. His labors were directed to the same end. This was his darling passion; a passion that held sway over his thoughts by day, and shaped his dreams by night; a passion that led him into the anomalous way of hearing the confessions of men with which the reader has become acquainted.

As was perhaps only natural, this singular method of searching out and dealing with penitents gave rise to many ludicrous stories. At times, however, these tales were possibly the inventions of irreverent wags who sought to make fun out of things holy. But they are too silly and improbable to merit the least credence. In another man Father O'Brien's way would have been odd and strange. In him it seemed quite proper. Nay, it appeared to be precisely what men expected of him; for they realized that he was an ambassador of Christ whose zeal would take advantage of almost any honest means to multiply his harvest of souls.

The following description of the missionary at this kind of work was given us in times past by an intelligent Catholic merchant who knew Father O'Brien long and well, and who met him or came across traces of his labors in various places. It abounds in interest and throws new light on God's faithful minister. We repeat it, as nearly as possible, in the language of the original narrator.

Father O'Brien had a most singular and cogent way of dealing with sinners. Where another would have only given offense, he seemed to succeed. There was something in his manner—a combination of human kindness,

of earnestness, of guileless simplicity, of quiet majesty, of divine charity—that could hardly fail to make its way to the heart.

Many of Father O'Brien's apostolic journeys were on horseback through sparsely settled districts. In this way, he was often overtaken by dark and obliged to spend the night with some hospitable farmer. On these occasions he always sought to lodge with Catholics. When he arrived at the homestead, he would wait in the yard until some one, generally the father of the family or his son, came to put his horse away. Then Father O'Brien, instead of going into the house, followed the man to the barn. Reaching the stable, the zealous priest invariably said: "My son, how long is it since you confessed your sins?" Or: "When were you at your duties last?"

Often enough, no doubt, then followed a dialogue that may be put in this way.

"Well, Father, I must confess that it has been some time."

"Very well then, my child, this is a good time for you to go to confession. Kneel down here at my side, and I'll hear it. You can go to confession here just as well as if you were in a church."

"But, Father, I'm not at all prepared. I'll go in the morning."

"Ah, my child, don't delay. There is no time like the present. I'll prepare you. You have today; but the Lord has not promised you tomorrow. Why, my child, you may be overtaken by death this very night, and be summoned before the judgment-seat of eternal justice ere the dawn of morning. Don't delay, my child; don't

delay. Go now—right now. Have no fear. I'll treat you nicely."

This fatherly exhortation settled the little controversy to the perfect satisfaction of both parties, for rarely, if ever, did the earnest priest fail in the accomplishment of his benign purpose. But this is merely a fair specimen of the child-like and loving manner by which he induced negligent Catholics to be faithful in the practice of their religious obligations. Indeed, the incidents of this character in Father O'Brien's life which have come to my ears would fill a volume. His manoeuvers for catching a soul were as skillful as those of a spider to trap a fly in its webby mesh. His method was often singular, even amusing; but it was effective, and it never gave the slightest offense.

If the home at which he put up over night were very distant from a church, as most generally happened, he heard the confessions of the entire household. Word was sent out to the Catholic neighbors that they also might come and make their shrifts, either in the evening or the next morning, preparatory for holy communion at mass. Father O'Brien always carried the necessaries for the holy sacrifice in his saddle-bags. Nor did he ever neglect this priestly function, when it was at all possible for him to perform it. He would fast until all hours in order that he might immolate his Eucharistic Lord on the altar of divine love.

We pass over here examples cited by our aged merchant friend to show how the missionary heard confessions along country roads, and the like. They are of a character with those recounted in previous chapters. Some of them have been given. But the rest of the description ought not to be omitted.

Father O'Brien's success in this sort of work, said the same gentleman, bordered on the miraculous. A spiritual intuition seemed to tell him when one needed to go to confession. Nor did he ever hesitate to act on the spot. If he encountered such a one in a city, town or village, where no church was at hand, he led his captive to the nearest store or shop. There he would say to the proprietor or person in charge: "Sir, this gentleman and myself have a little business to transact. Can you kindly give us a private place for a few moments?" Hardly were they alone, when the penitent fell on his knees and unburdened his heart to the gentle father confessor. Then they parted, both the happier because of the experience. [4]

The foregoing picture of the American apostle and his way of winning souls to God is but one of many of the same kind which we have heard from persons who knew him well. The only difference between it and the others is that they were not so nicely worded, nor so cleverly drawn. They all showed a priest afire with the spirit of Saint Dominic.

In regard to the apostolate of the confessional, however, which Father O'Brien carried on with unparalleled zeal, it should be noticed that he considered the sacrament of penance as only the beginning of his good work. It was a preparation for the worthy reception of the most holy Eucharist. He always exacted from those whom he shrove in odd places a promise that they would be as faithful in going to communion as circumstances permitted. Tradition tells us that the great majority kept their word.

[4] Notes taken years ago from conversations with Martin Scott, a former merchant of Somerset, Ohio.

Our Friar Preacher was truly "a fisher of men." In this spiritual avocation he was "wise as a serpent and simple as a dove." His thirst for souls inspired his cunning; his simplicity was a gift of a benign nature. Grace gave effect to his efforts, whilst it was probably God who protected him from the insults that would have been heaped upon an ordinary man. Everywhere the Dominican priest was on the outlook for souls. With him stage-coach, train, steamboat, highroad were as a church wherein he lost no opportunity of exercising his zeal for the spiritual betterment of his fellowman.

As a rule, this "sowing of the seed" in public places was done in the most unobtrusive manner. Still, meek and humble though he was, our anointed of the Lord feared no man. How he would face even desperate characters, when he felt that the interest of souls demanded it, will now be seen.

In the days when Father O'Brien visited New Orleans the city was noted for its sumptuous gambling houses. That their enticement for the public might be the greater, these resorts were so constructed that gorgeous suites could be clearly seen by all who passed along the street. Gambling, in fact, was one of the great vices of the old French town—an evil converted into a huge business.

On his sojourns in the city the earnest missionary, impelled by zeal for souls, did not hesitate to enter these hives of sin, when he noticed crowds of men lolling in them. Then he made his way to the tables around which the gamblers were gathered, mounted a chair, and cried out in his loudest voice: "I am a priest; and I am after any Catholics who may be in this place."

Having thus attracted the attention of the house, Father O'Brien proceeded to preach a sermon on the dangers of a gambler's life and the evils of his trade. The discourse always ended with the words: "Now, if there are any Catholics present, I want them to get down on their knees and promise me that they will never visit such places as this again."

Then came the strangest spectacle of all. Impelled by the burning words of the modern apostle, as well as impressed by the novelty and boldness of his zeal, Catholics and non-Catholics alike fell upon their knees and registered their promises as he demanded. Father O'Brien now plied his favorite art. He persuaded the Catholics to go to confession, and to pledge their word then and there that they would amend their lives.

In New Orleans he was regarded as an arch-enemy of gambling. The keepers of these resorts hated him. But not one of them dared to raise a hand against the fearless defender of religion and morality. [5]

One who should read only this phase of his life might be tempted to ask: "Was not Father O'Brien a fanatic?" Those, however, who have followed his career with attention could only answer in the negative. A fanatic is essentially narrow and intolerant. Our soul saver was precisely the contrary of this. Charity, benevolence and large-mindedness are conspicuous in all his actions. Intolerant of sin and vice he was; nor could any practical Christian, much less a faithful ambassador of Christ, be otherwise. But with the evil-doer himself he ever showed a great patience and toleration. He con-

[5] Father O'Brien's invasions of the gambling dens of New Orleans are still mentioned by not a few people in the west and the south.

demned sin—did all he could to eradicate it. The sinner he sought in every way to reform and to save.

That God approved His anointed's method is shown by its success. That he was guided and protected from above is indicated by the fact that he rarely ever gave offense, and that only once was a hand raised against him. His was "the folly of the cross."

A further illustration of the holy man's charity is contained in what we have now to relate. On one of his missionary excursions from Kentucky to the north he passed near a house, not far from Columbus, Ohio, in which lay a victim of intemperance. The poor man was at the point of death. He had been tortured by his conscience day and night, and was then in the depths of despair. Several priests had been to see him, but he would have nothing to do with them.

Fortunately a visitor who had just arrived recognized the modern apostle on the highway, and mentioned the fact in the sick-room. The very name of the Friar Preacher, for he was known far and wide for his zeal and goodness, acted like a charm on the dying man. Waking from his stupor, he exclaimed: "Father O'Brien come! Did you say Father O'Brien has come? Call him! Call him quickly! I want to see him." A courier started off post-haste, overtook the wonder-worker and brought him back. Father O'Brien spent the night at the home of the inebriate, who now made his peace with God and died with sentiments of sincere contrition before the departure of the messenger sent him by heaven.

Nor should it be omitted that, in connection with two visits of the apostle to Saint Joseph's Convent, near

Somerset, Ohio, miracles are at least suggested. The story is still told in the congregation no less than by the missionary's brethren in religion. It runs thus:

The community was short of bread, and had no flour with which to make more. Father O'Brien blessed the small loaf or two that remained. This the brother in charge of the refectory then continued to cut into slices until he had much more bread than was needed. Sister Theresa Norton, a Tertiary who cooked for the community at the time, and several of the lay brothers used to declare that they witnessed this phenomenon with their own eyes.

Frequent reference has been made to the influence of our harvester of souls over non-Catholics. With these he never argued, if he could possibly avoid it. Controversy, he believed, tends rather to confirm prejudices, for ordinarily people are loath to admit, even to themselves, that they have been worsted in an argument. Whenever a non-Catholic asked Father O'Brien a question on a point of doctrine, he gave such a clear, reasonable explanation that it produced a profound and permanent effect.

Before parting with the inquirer after truth he would take a catechism and a small work on Christian instruction from his pockets, hand them to the person, and say: "My friend, accept these little books, and read them at your leisure, but carefully. They will show you what the Church teaches, and give you the reasons for her claims. In the meantime, pray the Lord that He may lead you to the light. He will surely hear your earnest prayers." In the hands of this Friar Preacher such brochures proved a fruitful source of conversions to the Catholic faith.

Speaking on the subject of the American apostle's influence over those not of the Catholic faith, Father Lilly tells us:

It was usually strange and unaccountable even to the objects of it. I remember to have heard of his meeting with a Protestant young gentleman at a private house for the first time, and they had not been in conversation many moments when the young man found himself on his knees making a confession. When asked about the matter afterwards, the young man declared that he was himself astonished—that he had thought that there was not a being on earth to whom he would unburden his conscience as he did to Father O'Brien.

On another occasion he went into a store in an eastern city, and found a gay young man at the counter who showed him to another part of the store for what he wanted. Before passing on Father O'Brien took occasion to ask the young man some very commonplace questions in regard to salvation, and told him to think over it until he came downstairs. On his return the young man begged to be instructed in the Catholic faith.

These are only a few instances selected at random from thousands which mark the career of this extraordinary man. Nor was this potent influence confined to any certain class of individuals. The number of his converts is almost incalculable, and they embrace men of both high and low degree. . . . Indeed, he seems to have been treated with peculiar respect by men of mark whenever he met them. . . . [6]

Many cases of a character similar to those noted in Father Lilly's sermon have also come to the knowledge of the writer. As a matter of fact, we often discussed this very topic with the eloquent divine. A part of the summer before his death (December 3, 1914) we spent with him in the City of New York. On that occasion he declared that Father O'Brien was the most remarkable

[6] Father Lilly's sermon.

man he had ever known. The aptitude of our hunter of souls for this sort of work, no less than the skill with which he used every available means to insure its success, is pointedly illustrated by the following incident in his life:

Father O'Brien had been in Ohio on a missionary tour. On his way back to Saint Rose's he stopped in Cincinnati. Thence he visited one "Rody" Cavanagh, a friend of his boyhood whom he had not seen in many years. Cavanagh lived near a small town about eighteen miles south of Covington, Kentucky. The meeting of the two friends was a joy for both. They talked over old times and about old acquaintances. We may take it for granted that the earnest priest did not forget to inform himself anent the spiritual welfare of his host.

At the railway station, when he resumed his homeward journey, Father O'Brien found that the train was late. He then, as was his wont, got into a friendly talk with the ticket agent whom he soon discovered to be a sympathizer with the cause lost in the Civil War. The Lord's clever watchman saw at once that he might use his arrest in Louisville by the Union soldiers for the benefit of this soul.

He therefore told the agent about his captivity and ill treatment at the hands of the northern army, when on his way from Canada to Saint Rose's. The conduct, he added, of the defenders of the southern cause with whom he came into contact was quite different. They showed him the greatest courtesy and consideration. Nor did he neglect to praise, as in all truth he could, the bravery and the chivalry of the Confederate soldiers in general.

Having thus gained the southerner's good-will and confidence, Father O'Brien deftly turned the conversa-

tion on to his favorite topic of religion. The new-found friend, however, although a well-disposed man, was too firm in his convictions to change his creed of a sudden. When the train finally arrived, the modern apostle said: "Well, my child, I must go now. But I will make one request of you." Then he took a catechism and a little book of Catholic instruction from his pocket, handed them to the ticket agent, and suggested that he would read them. "Yes, Father," replied the man, "I will read them with pleasure." He did so, with the result that he and his family soon afterwards entered the Church. [7]

Thus did this extraordinary man go about the country, in his unassuming way, in quest of souls from year's end to year's end. In all that he did he sought the glory of God, the promotion of religion, and the salvation of his fellowman. One thought ever uppermost in his mind was to accomplish the greatest amount of good at the least possible expense to his humility.

Indeed, Father O'Brien shunned praise and notoriety almost as assiduously as he avoided sin itself. It pained him to hear his zeal or his good works lauded. When spoken to about things he had done, his answer was: "Not to me, but to God, give the glory, if glory be due. If I have accomplished anything good at all, it is because He has made use of me, though an unworthy instrument. Of myself I have done nothing; can do nothing. Blessed and praised be the name of God forever."

[7] This is evidently the same incident as that told in the *Nenagh News* of February 1, 1913. We have given it as we have always heard it. The correspondent of the *Nenagh News* is certainly in error when he places Father O'Brien's arrest in Louisville by the Union soldiers at the time when Generals Don Carlos Buell and Braxton Bragg were struggling for the mastery in Kentucky. Father O'Brien was then in Ontario, Canada. Neither does the *Nenagh News* tell us that the ticket agent and his family became Catholics. But this is certainly tradition in Kentucky.

CHAPTER XVI

LAST YEARS OF LABOR

One of the saddest things in this world is old age, when all hope is gone, the mind has faded away or assumed a second childhood, and a state of listless, morbid decrepitude has taken possession of the whole man. To the writer nothing is more painful than an old person's vacuous gaze into space. The more active and influential such a one has been, the greater the sorrow and pity caused by the sight of the physical and mental disintegration. It depresses with the thought of one's own possible inglorious ending.

On the other hand, we would search in vain for a source of purer and greater gratification than the sight of an aged person whose mind has retained its vigor, its cheerful disposition, its spirit of youth and love, its interest in both the past and the present, its courage, its hopes for the future, its activity for the betterment and uplift of the world, and its influence over men.

Such a spectacle makes us happy in the hope that we also may be useful until the end of our sojourn on earth. It inspires and urges us on to renewed efforts for good. Who so callous that he does not respond straightway to the warm hand-shake of a venerable, whole-hearted old man? The welcoming smile and the assuring twinkle in his eye derive an added charm from

the wrinkles and hoary locks in which they are enframed. It is largely under this aspect that we have now to consider the subject of our narrative.

When the thread of our story was broken, that the odds and ends of his previous life, together with incidents which could not be with certainty assigned to any particular period in his career, might be gathered up in a résumé, we left Father O'Brien at Saint Rose's. This was the venerable clergyman's favorite convent. For the people of that parish he had a special love. Here, therefore, he delighted to repair during his short respites from apostolic labors, particularly in the hot summer months. This, indeed, was about his only relaxation. Even then he spent his time in spiritual refreshment of the soul rather than in repose of the body.

The hunter of souls had a profound devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and to the Mother of God. During all his life as a priest and religious, unless when under the pressure of urgent business, rarely did he pass a church without entering it for a visit to the tabernacle and a prayer before the statue of our Lady. While at Saint Rose's on these periods of rest, if one may so designate them, he spent hours in presence of the Eucharistic Lord or at the altar of Mary Immaculate.

Saint Rose's Church, as the reader will remember from an earlier description of it, stands on the crest of a steep little hill, at the foot of which skirts a turnpike road. Midway up the slope, terraced for the purpose, ran a shady path parallel with the highway. When the missionary felt the want of fresh air, it was his wont to pace back and forth on this walk counting off his Rosary.

At that time horseback was almost the universal

means of travel used by the people in the country. Few had vehicles for that purpose. The modern apostle knew everyone far and near, and when a neighbor passed along the thoroughfare, he hailed him by name, and asked if he were in a hurry. If the answer were in the negative, as it usually was, the kindly priest replied: "Good, my child. Get off your horse and hitch it to the fence. Then come up here and help me say the beads. You know our Saviour tells us: 'Where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.' Surely you cannot be in better company than that of God and His ever Blessed Mother."

Rarely was the unsophisticated invitation declined, for few seemed able to resist our Friar Preacher's wishes. But Father O'Brien contented himself with having his companion recite five mysteries of the Rosary, the main purpose of which was to inculcate the habit of prayer and the practice of devotion to the Blessed Virgin among the men of the congregation.

In this way the gravel walk which he himself had built became known as "Father O'Brien's Rosary path." Even after the lapse of more than fifty years since his death, although it has long been overgrown with grass, the level stretch across the face of the precipitous hillock, is yet often called by this name and pointed out as one of the saintly Dominican's favorite resorts for prayer. Nay, the very soil is regarded as almost holy.

Unrelaxed toil and mortification had prematurely bowed the apostolic man's frame, silvered his locks, and deeply furrowed his fine brow. He appeared fifteen years older than he really was. However, his mind had

lost none of its vigor; his heart none of its warmth; his zeal none of its fire and glow; his will none of its strength and determination. For this reason, Father O'Brien's stay at Saint Rose's, after he returned there from Louisville, was brief. The call of a distant apostolate and the voice of God which spoke through his superiors placed him on the band of parochial missionaries.

This was not a new work for the harvester of souls; yet he had never been so constantly employed in it as he was to be for the next year or so. Back and forth it carried him across the country in every direction. A more edifying sight could scarcely be imagined than the way in which the grand old priest gave himself up to such arduous labors.

Despite the fact that his form was bent under the weight of years and toil, his looks frail, and his gait unsteady, apparently even almost tottering, he was still quick in his movements, as well as showed a vitality that surprised those who did not know him. Not even the youngest and strongest of his companions were more regularly or continually at their post of duty. All this, no doubt, helped to give potency to his ministrations no less than to win the admiration of the crowds that attended the missions.

In this apostolate Father O'Brien indulged to the fullest his passion for hearing confessions. Through much of the day and far into the night he sat patiently in the sacred tribunal with numbers gathered around to have the aged but zealous and mild-mannered agent of the Lord help them to make their peace with God. None selected him but rejoiced over the discovery of a skillful

physician of the soul, who could sound its miseries to their depths.

For a correct idea of the work of hearing confessions on parochial missions in those days we must remember that the faithful did not then receive the sacraments so frequently as they do now. The old leaven of Jansenism had not yet completely died out. At that time one might go to confession and communion once, or at the most twice, in a twelvemonth and still claim to be a first-rate Catholic. With all too many the Easter duty was the great thing in their spiritual lives. Perhaps the majority made their peace with God and received the Eucharistic Lord no more than three or four times a year. Quite naturally this practice superinduced in numbers a coldness and indifference, the result of which was an almost total neglect of the sacraments.

The announcement of a mission spread broadcast, with its spiritual advantages and opportunities for the forgiveness of sin, brought all sorts of persons to the church. They came with their accumulated burden of evil deeds to lay it at the feet of the missionaries. Not unfrequently the penitents, because of indifference, neglect and long absence from the sacraments, were not properly prepared. Then, of course, the confessor was obliged to take upon himself the extra labor of practically making the sinner's own confession.

Father O'Brien, through his long and varied experience, had become a passed master at this work. With a Christ-like charity and forbearance he listened to one tale of crime after another. Never did he manifest any ill humor. When he judged it necessary, and when his assistance was asked, he gently quizzed the penitent until

his most hidden sins were brought to light. There were those who felt that the American apostle could read the soul itself. No one left him without the happy conviction that he had made a clean sweep of his misdemeanors.

As in his other apostolic labors, so on parochial missions the ambassador of Christ preferred to work among men. To them his heart went out in all its fullness. He left nothing undone for their spiritual welfare. Stories are told of confessions heard by him, while on these missions, which recall those recounted in previous pages. He followed sinners even into their haunts, rounded them up there, and brought them thence to the church.

When Father O'Brien heard the shrift of a man whose soul had been crimsoned by a life of misdeeds, one of his favorite admonitions was:

"My child, I am only a man like yourself. Nor should I be able to tell you from Father Adam, did I not know that he is dead. So if you blush and hesitate, as well you may, to confess these things to me, why are you not ashamed, and even afraid, to do them in the sight of God? He made you; He is your father; He loves you as no man can love another; He knows and sees all things.

"Don't you realize that, were you to die with these sins on your soul, God would punish you with an eternal punishment? Now, my child, as you must know, the only condition on which my absolution will take away your sins is that you excite in your heart a sincere sorrow for them, make a firm purpose of amendment, and resolve that hereafter you will love and serve God."

The spiritual harvester had a happy faculty for arousing repentance in evil-doers. Spoken by one with his zeal, earnestness and unction, the words we have just

given could not fail to make a deep and permanent impression. As a rule, no doubt, they produced at least a fear that made for the betterment of the penitent.

Like his fellow-missionaries, our Friar Preacher knew well that the most effective work of a mission is done in the sacred tribunal. To it, therefore, he gave his best efforts. Ever and always his sermons had one end in view, that his hearers might be induced to receive the sacraments worthily. Tradition tells us that wherever Father O'Brien went, his confessional might be known by the numbers gathered around it waiting in turn to avow their sins.

Perhaps not even in his palmiest days had Father O'Brien preached with greater vigor or more effect than he did at this time. Despite his age, his voice had lost little, if any, of its strength; while wiry sinew and muscle gave him a power of endurance that belied his looks. Day after day he pleaded the cause of virtue in a manner that inspired his audiences alike with hatred of sin and love of God. Everybody was surprised to hear such sermons from a speaker so feeble in appearance.

At this time it seems to have been that our lowly Dominican came into contact with two of the most noted Catholic laymen of that day, Orestes A. Brownson and James A. McMaster. The distinguished converts heard him on missions in the City of New York, and both were captivated by his preaching.

Brownson, as the Rev. Thomas A. Powers has told us, declared that he was never so affected by a preacher, nor had ever derived so much good from a sermon. McMaster is said to have designated the missionary as "truth in action." It was Father O'Brien's plain, earn-

est way of presenting Catholic doctrine that appealed so strongly to these two critical minds. The clergy of the great American metropolis and Brooklyn were not less impressed by his zeal and life. After his death, more than one of them believed that he was a fit subject for at least beatification.

In connection with his work in New York we may note two other incidents that show how the modern apostle was ever on the watch for souls.

At that time it was the custom for missionaries to have their pictures taken. These were then placed on the stand for religious books and articles. Their sale helped to pay the expenses of the mission. Father O'Brien chose a non-Catholic to make his portrait. While the work was under way he engaged the photographer in conversation, and elicited from him a promise to attend the mission. This he did, with the result that he became a Catholic before our Preaching Friar left New York.

On another occasion Father O'Brien observed that an Irishman who sat opposite him in a street-car was somewhat under the influence of strong drink. As they approached the nearest point to Saint Vincent Ferrer's (Lexington Avenue and Sixty-fifth Street), whither Father O'Brien was bound, he arose, accosted the inebriate, and said: "My child, won't you kindly help an old man off the car?" At first, the stranger showed a hostile attitude. To this Father O'Brien gently replied: "Tut! tut! my child. Don't be rude. Come, give me the aid of your strong arm. You may be old yourself some day."

The man now got up and helped the aged priest to the ground. Then, as he was in the act of getting back into

the street-car, Father O'Brien took him by the arm, at the same time saying: "No, no, my child. Don't let your charity stop here. Come along with me, and see me safe at home on the next corner." The stranger complied with his request.

When they arrived at their destination, the missionary persuaded his spiritual prey to come into the convent. Once they were behind closed doors, Father O'Brien, in his irresistible way, lectured the man on the evils of drink, heard his confession, and had him take the pledge. From that day the former inebriate not only gave up his sinful habit, but also became a practical Catholic. [1]

During this time, too, the missionary's labors took him to Philadelphia, where he is said to have exercised his zeal with great effect. Archbishop Wood received him with joy, for he always derived much delight from the companionship of his Dominican friend, as well as welcomed the good which he was sure to accomplish. Indeed, that prelate held Father O'Brien in no less esteem than did Archbishop Ryan. He rarely spoke of him without calling him an apostle and a saint.

In no part of the country did Father O'Brien preach the papal jubilee and parochial missions with greater force and fruit than in the newly created Diocese of Columbus, Ohio. He traversed that diocese from end to end. The Right Rev. Sylvester H. Rosecrans, who had

[1] The facts thus far narrated in this chapter are still a matter of a living and happy tradition in the province. Not many years ago they were often spoken of alike by the older fathers and the people amongst whom the missionary labored. Aged persons still refer to them. During the past summer (1922) Sister Dominica Lanigan, of Saint Catherine's Academy, near Springfield, Kentucky (who was a young lady in New York at the time), spoke to us at some length of his work in that city. The *Freeman's Journal* of February 4, 1871, says that Father O'Brien's labors in the dioceses of Brooklyn and New York will long be remembered.

known and admired him before leaving Cincinnati for Columbus, now learned even to reverence him. The bishop never forgot the zeal shown by our harvester of souls, and always regarded him as one of the holiest priests who had labored for the Church in the United States.

Nor should we omit General Philip H. Sheridan's experiences with Christ's ambassador. On more than one occasion after the close of the Civil War, and at least once during the period of our missioner's life recorded in the present chapter, the gallant young officer, whilst on visits with his mother at Somerset, Ohio, happened upon Father O'Brien, whose apostolic labors had carried him into the same locality. Soldier and priest, chivalry and piety came face to face. The priest and piety were victorious. Father O'Brien, fearing lest the hero of many contests, because of the distractions peculiar to a soldier's life, should be careless about his religion, invariably questioned him on this point.

To give the brief parley between the general and the fisher of men were but to repeat what the reader has frequently seen. Suffice it, therefore, to say that the two friends soon turned off the main road into some byway. At the first secluded nook they found, both dismounted from their horses. Father O'Brien then sat down in a convenient place, possibly on the trunk of a fallen tree. Sheridan knelt by his side and made his confession with a humility that was as much to his credit as the bravery with which he had faced the enemy on the field of battle.[2]

On his last journey through Perry County, Ohio, the

[2] Mrs. Nellie Sheridan Wilson, a niece of the general, spoke of these incidents to the writer only a few months ago.

harvester of souls heard of a sick and aged man whose family name and place of residence aroused a suspicion that he might be a backslider. This was enough to set God's faithful minister in motion. Away he hastened on one of those errands of mercy characteristic of his life, and discovered that he had surmised only too truly. But the veteran delinquent, though death even then knocked at his door, was not at all disposed to receive the services of a priest. The missionary exhorted him and reasoned with him by turns. At first, all efforts were in vain.

Finally, Father O'Brien said to the decrepit old gentleman: "Now, my child, won't you at least say a prayer, and think a little about the future of your soul? In the meantime I will go out into the yard and pray for you there." The promise was given. Back and forth the zealous clergyman, with breviary in hand, now paced until he finished the divine office. To this were added other prayers for the conversion of the victim of religious indifference and untoward environment.

When Father O'Brien returned to the sick-bed, he found that grace had touched the heart of the dying man. The apostle then set about those saving ministrations which he had performed so many times under similar circumstances, and which had brought eternal life to numbers of souls without hope. [3]

Still another incident that belongs to this part of our Dominican's career, and that strikingly exemplifies the impression he made upon those even of the highest caste of society, is the following:

His missionary labors carried him into the State of

[3] The writer knew some relatives of this man.

Tennessee. Whilst at Memphis he met the Honorable Jefferson Davis, ex-president of the Confederate States of America. When introduced to Father O'Brien, "the venerable statesman knelt reverently down and asked the blessing of the venerable priest. It was," says Rev. H. F. Lilly, "the homage of genius to virtue, and was as honorable to the giver as to the receiver." [4]

Saint Rose's, near Springfield, Kentucky, is not easy of access. Thus, that he might have a more convenient center for his activities, our soul quester had been transferred from that place to Saint Louis Bertrand's, Louisville, at the time he was placed on the missionary band. Here also he remained for the labors of which we have now to speak.

The pontificate of Pius IX fell in troublous times. Few Popes have had such great difficulties to contend with as were those which confronted Giovanni Maria Mastai-Ferretti. Perhaps none were compelled to meet more. Only one other has filled the Chair of Peter so long. As his biographer correctly states:

> The nineteenth century was a new era. Old political forms were passing away; the laws and institutions which had been, from the remotest historical times, regarded as the foundations of the social and moral world, were so shaken and imperiled by the intellectual upheaval, that the ancient landmarks of truth and error were being daily obliterated more and more. [5]

To intellectual upheaval were added political tumults of portentous character. From the beginning of Pius' reign there were at work, at the very gates of Rome itself, forces destined to rob the papacy of the last vestige

[4] Lilly's sermon.
[5] O'Reilly, *Life of Pius IX*, p. 423.

of its temporal power before his death. The Christian world was in the throes of vast changes the consequences of which could not be foreseen. In his profound faith the Ninth Pius never feared that the Church, a citadel of truth, would be included in the possible wreck of nations, customs and opinions. His trust in the promise of Christ that the powers of evil should not prevail over her was boundless, although she was assailed by enemies from within as well as from without.

Yet, whilst convinced that everything depends on God, Pius believed that, as supreme Pontiff, he should act as though the preservation of the deposit of faith, the welfare of the Church, the salvation of his flock and their adherence to Christ were solely dependent on his eternal vigilance. He felt that the chief pastor should raise his voice above the din and storm of passion, prejudice and infidelity to proclaim anew the words of divine truth and the message of the Saviour.

From the day of his election to the Chair of Peter, therefore, the fearless Pope kept a constant eye on the trend of the times. Nor did he hesitate to utter warnings and protests against the evils of the day—even to anathematize errors that were subversive alike of faith, order and morality. Such is the burden of many of his most noteworthy bulls, encyclicals, briefs and allocutions.

Thus, for instance, the allocutions *Jamdudum Cernimus* of March 18, 1861, and *Maxima Quidem Laetitia* of June 9, 1862—the latter delivered in a public consistory of nearly three hundred bishops and cardinals—were aimed at the enemies of the Church, truth and religion.[6] Their dangerous doctrine was proscribed. On

[6] *Pii IX Pontificis Maximi Acta*, III, *Pars Prima*, 220-230, and 451-462.

December 8, 1864, came the encyclical *Quanta Cura,* with its renewal of the condemnations contained in the *Jamdudum Cernimus.* Indeed, the *Quanta Cura* was accompanied by the world-famed Syllabus of Errors. In this list were condemned eighty propositions, with the most perilous of the false tenets then current placed under their outstanding captions. [7]

Nor did Pius rest content with this. With near prophetic vision he foresaw the necessity of a fuller and more explicit, not to say scientific, statement of Catholic doctrine and belief. For this he would convoke an oecumenical council. No such assemblage had convened since that of Trent which closed its sessions on December 4, 1563. Another universal council, Pius felt, was among the imperative needs of the day. As the author just quoted expresses it:

> But he—the Vicar of Christ, the father of regenerated humanity —in the midst of the rising deluge of pride, disorder, anarchy, and licentiousness, resolved to build up in the eyes of the whole race the edifice of Catholic dogma, in a form so complete, that the whole earth must admire it and exclaim that the hand of God is there!
>
> True, at his advanced age he could scarcely hope for more than the consolation of opening the general council, and laying the first stones of the grand doctrinal structure he contemplated. But the work would go on after him. Pius dies; but Peter is ever living and teaching. [8]

As early as March, 1865, the watchful Pontiff began to take steps towards the realization of his long-con-

[7] *Acta Sanctae Sedis,* III, 161-176; *Pii IX Pontificis Maximi Acta,* III, *Pars Prima,* 687-717.

[8] O'Reilly, *op. cit.,* p. 424. This author gives a very interesting and illuminating account of the trials of Pius IX. Had not Rome been on the point of being taken by Italian soldiers, the council which he convoked might have ranked in importance with that of Trent.

ceived plan. For the next three years, in spite of business, annoyances and dangers of every species, Pius IX never forgot the proposed oecumenical congress of bishops. Nor did he overlook any opportunity for feeling the pulse of the hierarchy on the matter. Finally, on June 29, 1868, he issued the bull *Aeterni Patris,* by which the Vatican Council was convoked, and December 8, 1869, set as the day of its opening. [9]

This important document was followed by the letters apostolic *Arcano Divinae Providentiae* and *Jam Vos Omnes,* dated respectively September 8 and September 13, 1868. By the first the bishops of the Oriental churches not in communion with the Holy See were invited to attend the council. The second extended an earnest invitation to non-Catholics the world over seriously to consider a return to the Church established by Christ. Then came the brief *Nemo Certe Ignorat* of April 11, 1869, by which was promulgated a universal jubilee in order that the prayers of all the faithful might be obtained for light and guidance for the fathers gathered in solemn conclave. [10]

Thus was initiated and the way prepared for the twentieth and, up to the present, the last oecumenical council of the Church. All told, its meetings were attended by no fewer than seven hundred and seventy-four prelates of various ranks. [11] It was the largest—in some respects the most imposing—ecclesiastical assemblage the world has ever seen. Meanwhile prayers rose heav-

[9] *Acta Sanctae Sedis,* IV, 3 ff; and *Pii IX Pontificis Maximi Acta,* IV, *Pars Prima,* 412-420.

[10] *Acta Sanctae Sedis,* IV, 129, 130 and 502; *Pii IX Pontificis Maximi Acta,* IV, 429 and 433, and V, *Pars Prima,* 162.

[11] *Catholic Encyclopedia,* XV, 804, col. 2.

enwards throughout Christendom to bring down blessings and protection from above for those into whose hands providence had entrusted the direction of the kingdom of God on earth.

Rev. Matthew A. O'Brien, tradition tells us and his character assures us, showed a keen interest in the welfare of the Church then so sorely tried. The hostility manifested by the public press towards the temporal sovereignty of the Vicar of Christ pained him deeply. Pius IX he loved and revered, as well as pitied because of the humiliations and persecutions with which he was oppressed on all sides. It therefore gave our Friar Preacher no little joy to be among those selected by his provincial for conducting the jubilee in behalf of the oecumenical council. Heartily did he pray for its success.

Anyway, the apostle was too loyal a son of the Church, no less than too obedient a religious, not to accept such a commission with alacrity. Tradition tells us again that this labor of love acted as a tonic to his enfeebled body, and that he preached the jubilee with his old-time force, fire and effect. Work in the good cause rejuvenated his spirit. It was as if the soul of a youth had been infused into the corporal frame of an old man. But in the end, the result for himself proved like that of putting new wine into an old bottle.

Although he was now five and sixty years of age, Father O'Brien preached the jubilee in widely scattered parts of the country. It may be doubted, indeed, if any other priest advocated its cause so extensively or so continuously. Without fear of contradiction it may be stated that none proclaimed it more zealously or ardently. Everywhere crowds hung on his earnest words

—were stirred to devout prayer in behalf of the council and for the oppressed Vicar of Christ on earth.

In a brief summary of the American apostle's labors Father Arthur V. Higgins writes:

> From youth to death he knew no rest. His life was one of incessant toil and servitude. Even so late as the year 1869 he had, in no respect, abated the routine of his apostolical labors. He had long been in the habit of making missionary excursions, extending some beyond the northern lakes, some to the Atlantic Ocean, some as far south as the Gulf of Mexico. In that and the following year he preached the jubilee in various places, throughout more than a dozen states of the Union. An iron frame or constitution bore for years the burden with which he overtaxed it. Under such demands, however, no constitution could ultimately help failing and breaking down. He became prematurely gray and aged. But of his impaired health and vital powers he himself was not conscious. [12]

In consequence of his enfeebled health the harvester of souls was again assigned to Saint Rose's at the close of the jubilee. But before leaving Louisville he had formed an intimate friendship with the Right Rev. William George McCloskey. Like his predecessor, Bishop McCloskey made Father O'Brien his confessor, whenever he was at the convent. Even until the last years of his episcopate his lordship loved to speak of his attachment to one whom he considered so eminently a man of God. He really grew eloquent in his praise of Father O'Brien's zeal, virtues and the influence for good which he wielded over people of every creed and every walk in life.

[12] *Catholic Advocate*, February 4, 1871. By "an iron frame or constitution" Father Arthur V. Higgins, the writer of the article in the *Advocate*, evidently means an extraordinary power of endurance rather than strong, vigorous health. This latter, it seems quite certain, Father O'Brien never had.

The prelate often declared that he had never seen anyone with "a pair of such extraordinary eyes as those possessed by Father O'Brien." They seemed, he said, "to peer into one's very conscience and to read its most hidden secrets." For this reason, Bishop McCloskey did not wonder that many believed that the missionary could see through a stone wall. Although he never appeared to be on the watch, nothing seemed to escape his eye.

Often also was Doctor McCloskey wont to remark that he had not met another priest who could put so much unction and persuasive force as did Father O'Brien into his brief exhortation or advice after confession. This counsel he always closed with: "Now make a *good, sincere* act of contrition while I give you holy absolution." The way these words were said, asserted the bishop, could not but touch the most callous heart.

With the foregoing encomium of the modern apostle from his last ordinary we may pass on to the final drama of his useful life. It will prove not less replete with interest and edification than, we venture to believe, the previous pages have been found.

CHAPTER XVII

DEATH AND BURIAL

Father O'Brien's superiors, although Bishop McCloskey was reluctant to see his confessor leave the episcopal city, had him return to Saint Rose's in the hope that, under the influence of the country air, he might regain some of his lost strength. They felt that the province could not afford the loss of so exemplary a member, whose mere presence among the young men at the convent would exert a beneficial influence, even should he be no longer capable of any apostolic labor. This took place in the summer of 1869. He himself seems to have had a presentiment that his end was near. Nay, now that he had little or no vitality left, he requested to be sent to his beloved alma mater. It was there that he wished to die.

For more than a year before this fatal event, so soon to happen, it could be seen that, in spite of his busy life, the venerable servant of God was making special preparations for such an occurrence. In the spring of 1870, Father Lilly informs us, he received a communication from some of his relatives begging his interest in a worldly affair. "Answer the letter," he said to one of his brethren, "and give them my kindest regards; but tell them it is not worth while to trouble me with such mat-

ters in the future. It is time that I was giving my attention to more important affairs."[1]

Yet, even now, the old thirst for hunting souls still urged him to action. It was a passion that he could not resist. The same authority, therefore, assures us that:

> Now and then, indeed, the old passion for saving souls would get the better of him; and on such occasions he would forget his age and his infirmities and rush to the relief of the sinner. On one of the coldest days during the Christmas holidays I saw him about to start on one of these expeditions to apply a dispensation which he had just received from the bishop. I ventured to remonstrate with him on the imprudence of exposing himself on such a bitter cold day. "But," he replied, "we are bound to prevent sin whenever we can." And after a moment's hesitation he continued: "It is God's will, and He'll protect me." Every moment, however, of the intervals between such occasions was spent by him in earnest and assiduous prayer in preparing himself for the hour which he felt was drawing near.[2]

Many times during the last years of his life Father O'Brien had been warned under similar circumstances not to overtax his failing strength. But he invariably replied: "Let me go. This is God's work. He will protect me." No one had the heart to make further resistance. So off he would go on his errand of spiritual mercy. The above incident recorded by Father Lilly is the more noteworthy because the apostolic priest had just recovered from an attack of illness which, although brief, was so severe that it almost proved fatal.

However, it was the will of God that His faithful servant should not die in the place of his own choice, but in a way that would redound to his greater merit and

[1] Lilly's sermon.
[2] *Ibid.*

glory. On January 9, 1871, Father O'Brien left his beloved Saint Rose's on his last effort of charity. He was in the best of spirits. Yet, it would seem, they were buoyed up by the anticipation of the good which he hoped to accomplish. The journey had been long delayed through work on the missions, preaching the Vatican jubilee and poor health. Rev. Hugh F. Lilly says of this trip:

He had always a longing desire to leave the regular abodes of Catholicity, where the people are so well attended that they neither deserve nor appreciate the ministrations which they receive, and to go where he could find the sick in need of his medical skill. It was on such a mission he was when attacked by his final illness, so that he may be truly considered to have died a martyr to his zeal for the salvation of souls.

A couple of years ago he received one of his usual out-of-the-way calls down to Barren County [Kentucky], in the neighborhood of Glasgow, to attend a young man by the name of Quigg who had been converted whilst in college at Bardstown, and who was dying of consumption. Whilst there Father O'Brien improved the opportunity to speak of Catholicity to the family and friends, and to revive the slumbering spark of faith in the few Catholics whom he found there.

The consequence was that before he left he was prevailed upon by both Protestants and Catholics to promise that he would use his best endeavors to build a church for them; and they even wanted him to promise that he would come and be their pastor. He, of course, told them that this was impossible; but they would give him no peace in regard to building their church until he put the project in shape. This he did by obtaining the bishop's consent a few months ago to start a subscription for the purpose.

Strange to say—though the event was scarcely strange in Father O'Brien's experience—the list was headed by a Protestant gentleman of wealth and influence, who has since been active in his endeavors to obtain subscriptions. Father O'Brien had promised this

gentleman to be in Glasgow on last Sunday, but in the inscrutable ways of providence God had otherwise ordained. On that day he was a corpse. Such is a brief history of the last in a long list of works of zeal which were undertaken by this servant of God for the greater honor and glory of his heavenly Master.[3]

Father O'Brien's magnetic power over people could hardly be better illustrated than by his success at Glasgow, for it is one of the most bigoted localities in the State of Kentucky. To this day one priest stationed at Russellville, Logan County, with a mission at Glasgow and another at Franklin, Simpson County, has charge of a large area in which little more is known of Catholicity than in the jungles of wild Africa, or in wide stretches of pagan China.

Thither our modern apostle started on his last travels in the service of the Lord. First he went to Louisville which, as he had then to travel, was some eighty miles from Saint Rose's, the first eleven of which had to be made either on horseback or in a buggy. This was on Monday, January 9, 1871. On Tuesday he saw Bishop McCloskey, receiving from him final instructions in regard to the proposed church at Glasgow. On Wednesday, still sustained and joyous because of the thought of the consolation he hoped to bring to a desolate people, Father O'Brien bade his brethren good-by at Saint Louis Bertrand's, and began the second lap of his journey, one hundred miles to the south.

The ambassador of Christ had not proceeded far, however, when he was seized with chills. By the time he reached Elizabethtown, he had become so ill that the conductor had him transferred to a north-bound train

[3] *Ibid.*

and taken back to Louisville. There he was hurried to Saint Joseph's Infirmary. By Saturday, under the care of skilled physicians and the good Sisters of Charity, the tireless missionary had so far recovered that he seemed out of danger. But during the night pneumonia developed, and "his constitution was too weak and exhausted to await the crisis."

Thus the great, the good, the holy and the apostolic Rev. Matthew A. O'Brien passed to his eternal reward on the morning of Sunday, January 15, 1871. The end came so suddenly that the anointing priest, who happened to be in the hospital at the time, had scarcely completed the last unction when he expired. Yet the call found him willing, ready and prepared to meet his God. One who was then in the city tells us: "He yielded his soul to its Creator with that calm, serene assurance of a happy immortality, which results from a faithful discharge of all the duties that religion enjoins." [4]

Although his brethren in general believed that he had not long to live, Father O'Brien's death, coming in the way it did, was not only a surprise but also a shock to them as well as to his many friends and admirers. It occasioned a profound and wide-spread grief. However, it was a glorious crowning of a noble life. Of the spectacle witnessed in Saint Louis Bertrand's Church, where his body lay in state, the Rev. Arthur V. Higgins writes:

> Thither for two days repaired a continuous concourse of people, actuated by profound sentiments of sorrow and veneration. To the general expression of appreciation no class, no denomination formed any exception. Such was the character of Father O'Brien as to

[4] Rev. A. V. Higgins, in the *Catholic Advocate* of February 1, 1871, and Lilly's sermon.

extort even from those who held the most opposite opinions, perhaps a reluctant, yet unmistakable homage of admiration. Tears and sighs, sobs and ill-suppressed outbursts of agitation indicated the heavy load of sadness which oppressed all minds. On Tuesday morning, the bishop of the diocese celebrated, for the repose of his soul, a pontifical high mass of requiem.[5]

The venerable Rev. Robert A. Abell, one of Kentucky's most eloquent clergymen and a life-long friend of the apostle, claimed the privilege of delivering the funeral oration. Albeit he was then in his eightieth year, the noted orator is said to have excelled himself on this occasion. So Father Higgins continues:

After the ceremonies, Father Abell proceeded to preach the panegyric. It was an eloquent and touching tribute to the memory of the deceased. The speaker's voice was tremulous with uncontrollable emotion. Frequently the excitement and intensity of his feelings compelled him to pause in the discourse. It was a eulogy well merited and well rendered, proceeding from the heart to other hearts. The audience was melted to tears.[6]

Thousands, we have been told, came to pay Father O'Brien their last respects and to view his remains whilst they lay in the Dominican church, Louisville. The sacred edifice could accommodate only a small part of those who assembled for the mass and sermon. After these ceremonies there was another not less signal expression of love for a faithful priest, and of grief over departed worth. Besides the many who made their way

[5] *Catholic Advocate,* February 1, 1871.

[6] It is worthy of note that Rev. Robert A. Abell, a frequent visitor and always a welcome guest at Saint Rose's, also preached the funeral oration for Father James T. Polin, Father O'Brien's saintly novice master. This was in Christmas week, 1838. Then, too, the eloquent divine entranced the congregation by his portrayal of his subject's virtues.

to the train across lots and otherwise, the funeral cortège stretched along Sixth Street from Saint Louis Bertrand's to Broadway, and extended thence to the railway station at Tenth Street and Broadway. It was an inspiring sight. On this Father Higgins writes:

> When the services had closed, a procession was formed to accompany the remains to the depot, for it had been determined to express them to St. Rose for interment. Seldom on the death of any private person has such a demonstration of public regard been made in the streets of Louisville. To the friends of the deceased the spectacle was a source of melancholy gratification. In their eyes, it was on the part of the community an unequivocal acknowledgement of the lofty qualities which had adorned Father O'Brien's character.

At Saint Rose's, which had been Father O'Brien's home the greater part of his religious life, the manifestation of honor and reverence for him, no less than of sorrow over his demise, was even more edifying and impressive than had been the scene witnessed in Louisville. Delegations from various parishes met the train that bore the remains of the venerated priest to Lebanon, eleven miles from the convent. Indeed, the men had determined to carry the coffin on their shoulders by relays, or to draw the hearse in turn, the entire distance. All the persuasive powers of the clergy were required to dissuade them from undertaking so arduous a token of respect, however impossible the task should prove. [7]

[7] Neither Higgins nor Lilly speak of this phenomenal expression of respect. Perhaps they passed it over because they regarded it as uncalled-for and foolhardy. Yet we have heard it from persons who were among those who met the train at Lebanon. The late E. O. Walker, of whom mention has been made, spoke of it in one of the writer's last talks with him. In his letter of March 1, 1908 (quoted on a previous page), Father J. B. McGovern writes: "Don't omit that. . .when his body reached the depot nearest to Springfield (I think Lebanon, twelve miles away), men, by relays, carried the coffin the entire road to St. Rose." Tradition, as Father McGovern got it, confounded the wish with the act.

People from miles around had gathered at Saint Rose's to meet the corpse. They came afoot, on horseback and in every sort of primitive conveyance until the adjacent grounds, extensive as they are, were packed with friends and admirers of the dead ambassador of Christ. In the throng were white and black, non-Catholics as well as Catholics, persons of no religious allegiance, even those without creed or faith. All minds had one object in view, honoring him whom they had known only to love, trust and esteem. The same scene was re-enacted on the morrow, Wednesday, January 18, at the mass and funeral.

On both these occasions tears and sobs were even more profuse and frequent than they had been in Louisville. Of the reception of Father O'Brien's remains at his alma mater the same writer gives us an exquisite picture, although he does not mention these impressive exhibitions of grief and sorrow. Thus he proceeds to say:

> About the middle of that afternoon, the funeral cortège arrived within sight of St. Rose. Heavy laden had all hearts grown in expectation of that sight. One short week before had Father O'Brien left St. Rose Convent with promise of life for years, and now he was returning a corpse.[8] It was on other occasions the custom to receive him with lively expressions of joy and welcome. The welcome was now turned to the plaintive strain in which the Church bewails the departure of her children and implores for them the mercy of the just judge, who discovers imperfection even in His ministering spirits.
>
> *Libera me Domine de morte aeterna* arose from lips that blanched and quivered with anguish. The note of death, caught up by hill

[8] This sentence does not tally with Father Lilly's sermon, nor with tradition. While no one seems to have expected the missionary's death so soon, or on this journey, both Lilly and tradition tell us that the prevailing opinion was that he had not long to live.

and valley, was borne away till the echo lost itself in the distance. So was he conducted to the place in whose history and biography his memory is imperishably enshrined. In the church which he himself had erected, mass was on the following morning solemnized for the repose of his soul.

During the ceremonies the funeral oration was delivered by Rev. H. F. Lilly. It was marked by the chaste and highly polished style of eloquence which characterizes all of his literary productions. But the matter and manner were even more impressing than the style. As he proceeded to describe the life and virtues of Father O'Brien, his charity, his zeal for the propagation of truth, his passion for the salvation of souls, all his rare and ennobling traits of character, the conviction flashed upon every mind that Catholicity, that the best interests of society had sustained a serious and deplorable loss. [9]

Nor were such attestations of esteem confined to those who were privileged to be present at the great priest's obsequies. Wherever he had labored, solemn requiems were sung for the repose of his soul and eulogies pronounced in his praise. In all these places throngs not only assisted at the services, but also gave unmistakable testimony of their affectionate regard for the deceased Friar Preacher.

Father H. F. Lilly's calm, undemonstrative temperament and deliberate, judicial mind give added weight to the sermon he preached at Saint Rose's in honor of Christ's brave soldier. "There is something, my brethren," began the speaker, "an indefinable something, in the surroundings of to-day that marks the present as no ordinary occasion." [10] Then, after a few remarks about the drapery of sorrow in which the church was clothed, he proceeds to declare:

[9] *Catholic Advocate*, February 1, 1871.
[10] Lilly's manuscript sermon.

But, over and above this, there seems to be a pervading sense of calamity all around us, silently and irrepressibly impressing us with a knowledge of the fact that a good and a great man has gone from amongst us. Ah, my brethren, I repeat it, the present is no ordinary occasion. [Then the orator speaks briefly of the death of religious and priests in general, and closes the paragraph with:] But the death of such a priest as the one whose mortal remains now lie before you is an event the parallel of which does not occur many times in the same century.

The preacher now draws a parallel between Fathers O'Brien and Polin, the latter of whom died late in 1838. As there is today, so "on that sorrowful occasion there was not one of those present who did not feel that he had lost a friend, a benefactor, a comforter, a father, and their sorrow for their loss found expression in their sobs and tears." Bewailing his inability to do justice to his subject, Father Lilly continues:

You are all witnesses of Father O'Brien's extraordinary virtues, and there are even many of you who are, no doubt, better acquainted with him than I am. He has been amongst you during the greater part of his priestly career. His locks grew grey in your service; his shoulders were stooped in ministering to your wants. There is not a hamlet for leagues around that has not been hallowed by his presence, not a family that does not owe something to his indefatigable zeal.

It is true, indeed, that his affections were not localized, nor limited to this congregation, nor to this state. On the contrary, no matter where his field of labor may have been, for the time he entered upon it with all the energy and determination of which his strong will was capable, and cultivated it with an untiring industry in which missionary life in any country affords us but few examples.

Yet I have reason to know that St. Rose and its surroundings were the idol of his heart; and in the midst of his various occupations thousands of miles away his mind and his affections constantly

reverted to his quiet Kentucky home, and he longed for the time when he might be assigned to it for the remainder of his days. He loved you with the tender solicitude of a father, and justice and gratitude alike demand that you join with me in according him his due reward of praise.

The rest of Father Lilly's oration is mostly devoted to a study of the character of this hunter of souls; to a portrayal of his virtues, zeal and labors; to examples of his charity, of the conversions he made, and of the influence he wielded over others; to his final preparation for death. Quotations from the sermon under these headings the reader will, no doubt, remember in the course of our pages. Its close runs thus:

Go to his room at any hour during the day, and you were certain to find either his breviary, his beads or a volume of the lives of the saints in his hand; and if he walked out, his cane was in one hand and his beads in the other. Such was his life—such his preparation for death. Throughout his long and laborious career he was above all things anxious, like St. Paul, lest, whilst he preached to others, he might himself become a castaway.

And now that he has gone to receive the reward of his labors, can we not say, in the words of the same apostle, and with singular appropriateness, that he has fought the good fight, he has finished his course, he has kept the faith, and he has gone to possess the crown which a just judge has reserved for him in heaven? Such is our abiding conviction after a careful and unimpassioned survey of his life . . . May the benedictions of the myriads whom he has befriended, the poor whom he has relieved, the afflicted whom he has consoled, the perplexed whom he has counseled, be his advocates today before the throne of mercy, if their intercession still be necessary.

So lived, labored and died one of the outstanding clerical figures in the central states during the past century.

FATHER O'BRIEN IN HIS LAST YEARS.

WHERE FATHER O'BRIEN IS BURIED.

Thus was he, nay, is still, not only honored but even profoundly revered. His name is indelibly written on the pages of our American ecclesiastical history. With mighty energy and unceasing devotion did he work to save souls, to spread religion, to strengthen the Church, and to build up his Order in his adopted country. As a writer in the *Freeman's Journal* tells us:

> No panegyric could do justice to the life and character of Father O'Brien. Always in delicate health, and yet undismayed by the most appalling hardships of western missionary life, he had labored for thirty years with untiring zeal, and with almost unparalleled success. From the minds of thousands he dispelled the clouds of error, he healed the bruised and broken hearted, he reconciled those at variance, . . . and has now gone to receive in heaven the reward of his labors.[11]

[11] *Freeman's Journal*, February 4, 1871.

CHAPTER XVIII

A CHARACTER STUDY

When the preceding chapter was completed, we thought our task, with the exception of a little retouching and revision, had come to an end. The manuscript, however, was sent to the Right Rev. John T. McNicholas. His lordship, we knew, had formerly interested himself in a life of the American apostle. Thus it was felt that he might make some suggestions for the betterment of the proposed biography. The bishop replied:

Duluth, Minnesota, January 18, 1923.

My dear Father:

Every one who reveres the memory of Father Matthew Anthony O'Brien, O.P., as well as those who will become acquainted with him for the first time through your work, must be grateful to you for your painstaking efforts in collecting the data and traditions of this saintly apostle and giving them to the public. For years I have hoped that your many duties and important historical research work would permit you, before it was too late, to gather valuable information from those who knew personally the noted Dominican missionary. That you have been able to do so makes the Dominican family grateful to you, and also all who are interested in our remarkable pioneer apostles of the Church in the United States.

As you have stated, I once urged the late Miss Eleanor C. Donnelly to write Father O'Brien's life. She actually began to plan it, but her age and infirmities, the death of two sisters and the care of another did not permit her to advance farther than to write to

Archbishop Ryan, whose reply you have published. From personal knowledge I can vouch for the esteem and veneration which His Grace the Archbishop felt for Father O'Brien. More than once I have heard the venerable prelate speak of him as a saintly priest whose virtues were of the heroic order. He seemed to think that the Dominican Fathers should seek the judgment of the Church regarding his sanctity. He considered the conversion of the woman in St. Louis a genuine miracle.

I have read the seventeen chapters of the manuscript. No one but yourself would have had the infinite patience to search out and to assemble the facts and traditions, to interview those whose memories go back to Father O'Brien, to weigh their statements, and to arrive at the historical conclusion and judgment that you have recorded. Your work presents a true picture of Father O'Brien as one heard him spoken of by those who knew and revered him. "An American Apostle," or "A Modern Apostle," would be a very appropriate title for his biography. A true apostle he was!

Do not fear that you have laid too great stress upon the traditions connected with him, or exaggerated the wonderful things attributed to him. From what I have heard the old people in Kentucky and Ohio say, I know that your historical judgment has measured and stated conservatively the stories current about Father O'Brien. The venerable priests and lay-brothers of the Order, especially Fathers Lilly (H.F.), McKenna and Higgins, and Brother Anthony [Hickey], often spoke to me of him in terms of extravagant praise and admiration. Historical truth demands a faithful presentation of facts as they are found. Besides, you cannot well omit the background which these traditions current about Father O'Brien furnish. Their omission would make his biography incomplete.

May I venture to suggest that you add another chapter to your "Life of Father O'Brien?" A study or analysis of his character by one who has given so much thought and time to this truly great apostle cannot but give us a better appreciation of him. It will be both interesting and instructive. His correspondence with grace and his fidelity to duty, according to all the traditions familiar to us, give him title to a first place as a modern apostle.

With sincere good wishes, hoping that your Life of Father O'Brien will be appreciated by a very wide circle of readers, I am,

Fraternally yours in St. Dominic,

✠JOHN T. MCNICHOLAS,
Bishop of Duluth.

Indeed, the question of Father O'Brien's character, as well as that of his power and influence over others, is not new. Time and again these topics have been discussed both within and without the Order. They still not unfrequently arise among his brethren in religion. Undoubtedly they have occurred to more than one reader of the previous chapters. Nor is the matter void of difficulty. In the opinion of the writer, the best, if not the only, key to the solution of the problem, is to be found in the words of Bishop McNicholas: "His correspondence with grace and his fidelity to duty, according to all the traditions familiar to us, give him title to a first place as a modern apostle." This sentence voices a fact that may clearly be drawn from his entire life, whether as a religious or as a priest.

His life indicates that he received many wonderful gifts from above, shows that he readily obeyed the best impulses, and reveals that in his every action he was swayed by a charity which made him love God more than all things else and his fellowman in and for God. To a careful, even scrupulous, observance of the rule of his Order he joined its tradition of ceaseless labor to spread the kingdom of Christ on earth, and to multiply the saints in heaven. In other words, Father O'Brien was keenly aware that man can aspire to nothing more divine in this world than the sanctification of his own soul. A true son of Saint Dominic, he knew that he

could engage in no more exalted or meritorious work than that of co-operation with the Blessed Master in the salvation of the souls of others. These two objects of his Order he ever kept before his mind, and he constantly strove to realize them by faithfulness to his vocation as a Friar Preacher. Grace did the rest.

Fortunately others, even those who were personally acquainted with him, have studied the soul saver's character and left us the result of their inquiry. It is substantially the same as the conclusion which we have just outlined. In this way, but little more is needed in this closing chapter than to place their own words before the reader.

Rev. Hugh F. Lilly, for instance (in the sermon so often referred to), speaks of the great missionary's zeal and virtues. Then he proceeds to say:

> But what was it that has given Father O'Brien his fame throughout the length and breadth of America? You all know that socially and intellectually considered he was not supposed to be possessed of many attractions. In the latter respect especially he has been rather underrated than otherwise. It is true indeed that he had made no profound studies, and was utterly devoid of any pretensions to erudition. But nature had endowed him with a keen and penetrating mind which enabled him to comprehend at a glance the dispositions of those with whom he came in contact. [1]

Yet, while it is true that the Friar Preacher did not have a full and long course of theology, and studied but little philosophy—he began his curriculum too late in life for this—, it is equally true that he had no mean knowledge of the divine sciences. Rarely did he make a mistake in the solution of a theological difficulty. He

[1] Father Lilly's funeral oration.

had a ready acquaintance with the Sacred Scriptures. Much reading quickened his mind, broadened his vision, and strengthened his grasp of things.

Still, as Father Lilly suggests, the harvester of souls profited less from his scholarship than from "a fund of that gift of heaven, good sense, which frequently stands men in greater stead than great learning." This statement, we believe, cannot be gainsaid. It has come down to us in no uncertain way that he had an extraordinary judgment, and was blessed with a rare gift for dealing with men and practical problems.

> In social intercourse, too [says the same authority], he was affable, kind and polite to an extent that astonished those who judged of him from first appearances, whilst his ready foresight into the wants of others and his promptness to anticipate them gained him many a life-long friend. But otherwise he was of a very retiring disposition; so that, if we would account for his wide-spread influence, I repeat that we must seek its cause elsewhere than in his social and intellectual qualifications.
>
> In Father O'Brien it was the priest and not the man that was admired. And in his sacerdotal character, again, he was admired and reverenced for the possession of that quality which, when regulated by prudence, constitutes the very glory of the priesthood—that virtue, devoid of which, a priest is but a hireling, and instead of gathering with Christ he scattereth. It was zeal for the salvation of souls that was the one great distinguishing characteristic of his life. With him this zeal became a passion, a darling passion, an almost monomania. It shaped his dreams by night—it was the object of his reflections by day. [2]

In all this one can see the workings of God. Correspondence with grace and faithfulness to a divine vocation in the Order of Preachers are patent everywhere.

[1] *Ibid.*

From the gist of the sermon, however, it is quite evident that Father Lilly does not wish to imply that the *"man"* was not admired for his many great qualities, but that it was pre-eminently as a zealous minister of heaven that our missionary won the almost unmeasured admiration which he commanded. We know from Father Lilly himself that he considered the harvester of souls the most remarkable personality he had ever met.

So again, Rev. Arthur V. Higgins, in an article on his saintly confrère for the *Catholic Advocate,* devotes quite a lengthy disquisition to an analysis of his character. It is an excellent study, and is clothed in classic English. It begins:

> The analysis of Father O'Brien's character is a most difficult task. The process of its formation, what were the exact sources of its strength, what were the precise limits of its power, these things were to some of his life-long friends a kind of mystery. He sought concealment with as much assiduity as other men seek publicity. His constant object was to effect the greatest amount of good at the least expense to his modesty and humility. His unpretending air made him often pass for an ordinary man.[3]

It was largely these natural drawbacks which the world is averse to overlook, together with his awkwardness, ungainly appearance and neglectful dress, that rendered Father O'Brien's marvellous power for good so unfathomable a mystery to most people. Under a common and unadorned exterior, however, there pulsed an exceptional heart whose warmth won the affections of all who came within its reach. The writer in the *Advocate,* therefore, continues:

[3] The *Catholic Advocate,* February 4, 1871. See note 5 of Chapter IX, page 89.

But it is certain that he possessed a wonderful magnetism which fascinated whatever was in the sphere of its activity. In this very fascination lay the mainspring of his popularity and influence. To many causes did this attraction owe its origin. In some degree it was owing to his social parts; in some degree to a rare combination of moral and intellectual qualities, but chiefly to an admirable union of nature and grace, approaching in him almost as near the standard of ideal perfection as human infirmity permits.

Father O'Brien, according to all who knew him, was endowed with rare moral traits. So did he possess a strong mentality that, in spite of his retiring and unassuming disposition, could not but dominate. These qualities combined with his amiability, charity, good judgment and mental poise to make generous amends for his lack of external polish. Nature cast him in a noble mold, gave him a poetic spirit, and blessed him with a lively imagination, all which helped him to gain the good-will of people as well as to buoy him up in his arduous labors. They almost made one forget an unshapely figure, a gawky carriage and a homely face, about the only relieving features of which were a gentle, assuring smile and a kindly twinkle in a pair of lustrous eyes.

Yet in the last analysis, as Father Higgins states, it was grace, the apostolic priest's profound religious convictions, his zeal and his fidelity to duty that gave him the masterful command which he wielded so suavely, still so effectively, for good. Grace, in short, supernaturalized the man and vitalized him with a psychic force that was not easily understood or resisted.

No man [says Higgins] ever possessed a finer sense of honor, a better judgment, a keener perception of propriety, a readier apti-

tude of compliance with the etiquette and manners of society. There was in his composition and structure scarcely a flaw or blemish. All the qualities which infuse strength and firmness into character were in his character mingled and blended in exquisite proportion with all the qualities which lend to it the charm of artless simplicity and tenderness.

From nature he had received a loving and amiable disposition, a generous heart, an ardent and lively fancy. He was deeply imbued with the spirit of poetry, not indeed in its higher mode of action, but in the form of sympathy with whatever is beautiful and pure and good. 'To him a primrose by a river's brim was a primrose and something more." All nature for his imagination teemed with delight and pleasure. Earth and air and sky were touched and transformed with the brightness and glory of another world. Rosy fingered morn, the verdure of field and mead, the odorous flowers of spring, the sweet songsters of the grove, ravished with the ecstacy of their own music, were all only revelations of God's love and power and majesty.[4]

Some readers may be tempted to think this estimate of our American apostle but little more than a fanciful and poetical effusion of an ardent admirer. Poetical it is; fanciful it is not, for Father O'Brien was a son of nature. There still live aged persons who will tell you how he saw the Creator in all the works of His hands. A flower, the graceful sweep of a stream, a landscape, any and every beautiful object, spoke to him of God, His love, power, majesty, wisdom, glory and perfection —of the happiness of heaven and the blessed who dwell there.

The Preaching Friar, it is true, was full of the poetry of religion. Yet his intellectual balance and poise were such that, though he grew eloquent, he never became emotional. There was no hysteria in his spiritual make-

[4] *Ibid.*

up. He ever remained sane, standing firm on the basis of reason and common sense. He possessed a mind that was eminently deliberative. For this reason, Father Higgins adds:

> But his was not one of those minds in which the poetic feeling degenerates into sentimentalism. It was not one of that soft, pliant description, taking its form and impress from the slightest and latest contact. Its healthy organization drew from every source and assimilated to itself only what was sound and most nutritious. A systematic education it had not, but its natural faculties were cast in so fine a mold as to stand in little need of a re-touching and polishing of art. These elements of strength undoubtedly lay at the basis of his character, forming the nucleus of its force and power.

Brownson declared Father O'Brien the most effective preacher he ever heard. McMaster characterized him as truth in action. Powers depicts him as a fearless soldier of Christ. McGovern, Lilly and others attribute to him every manly quality. Higgins goes still farther, not only giving him the heart of a saint, but even making its pulsations beat with the rhythm of an angelic lyre.

Thus, according to his eulogists, nature, in spite of an untoward appearance, conferred many favors on the modern apostle. A beautiful soul dwelt within an uncomely body. With him it was as it is often with the most delicious fruit, the sweetest kernel is imprisoned in the roughest shell. Yet it was not his natural gifts, but divine grace, working in and through these, and faithful response to its impulse that gave him his extraordinary potency and phenomenal influence, and won for him the confidence and affection of all with whom he came into contact. As Father Higgins truly says:

But into the composition of that character entered other elements of strength, infused and intermingled not by the hand of nature, but by the hand of God. To what would otherwise have been inert and incomplete this infusion imparted the vitality and perfection of a living organism.

Father O'Brien was, in truth, a living organism of the supernatural order, in which God had concentrated vast forces for the instruction and salvation of man. The efficiency and success with which he applied these forces are beyond all praise. Never did man discharge a mission more disinterestedly, more blamelessly. To the fulfillment of that mission, in the highest form, his eye was ever clear and single. It cast no side glances at the motives which actuate lower [minds]. [5]

His sphere of life lay in those regions where only lofty and active spirits are able to soar. Whoever would form a judgment of his character, without taking into consideration the supernatural part, would find only mysteries and perplexities. But the interpretation seems easy, if the union of the two orders be kept in view—if his whole life be regarded only as the transparency of a crystal vase through which shone the light and beauty of a higher life, attracting all, elevating all, transforming all to the likeness and image of the source from which it emanated. [6]

Several aged persons, on reading Doctor Higgins' exquisite delineation of Father O'Brien's character which we showed them, replied with a fervent: "So it was." They declared that it was only in this higher light that the man and his work could at all be understood. To the many who either could not, or did not, rise to a consideration of the supernatural in his life he ever remained an enigma.

He lived in God and for souls. God, in turn, blessed him, supernaturalized his motives and his labors, gave

[5] We have substituted the word "minds" for "motives" in the original, which is evidently a typographical error. There are a number of such errors quite patent in the article of the *Catholic Advocate*.

[6] The *Catholic Advocate* as in note 3.

him a strength, a power and an influence that were not of this world. It was this that enabled his soul to command his body. It caused his zeal, though one would think it could scarcely be greater, to gather force year by year. During the last decade of his life, in spite of age and many infirmities, it became cyclonic and spent itself only in death.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. PRINCIPAL MANUSCRIPT SOURCES

Archives of the Dominican Master General, Rome.—Archives of the Dominican Fathers, Tallaght, Ireland.—Archives of Saint Joseph's Province of Dominicans, United States.—Archives of Saint Rose's Priory, near Springfield, Kentucky.—Archives of Saint Joseph's Priory, near Somerset, Ohio.—Archdiocesan Archives of Cincinnati.—Diocesan Archives of Louisville.—Catholic Archives of America, Notre Dame University.—Archives of Mount Saint Joseph's Academy, near Cincinnati.—Diocesan Archives, London, Ontario.

Church records of Saint Rose's (near Springfield), of Holy Rosary (Blincoe), and of Saint Francis Xavier's (Raywick), Kentucky.—Church records of Saint Joseph's (near Somerset), of Saint Patrick's (Junction City), of Saint Thomas' (Zanesville), of Holy Trinity (Somerset), of Saint Rose's (New Lexington), of Saint Bernard's (Corning), and of the Church of the Atonement (Crooksville), Ohio.—Church records of Saint Peter's Cathedral, London, Ontario.—Records of the Registry Office, London, Ontario.

II. PRINTED SOURCES AND OTHERS THAT MAY BE CONSIDERED AS BELONGING TO THAT CLASS

Acta Sanctae Sedis, Vols. III and IV.—*Annals of Ireland* (the Four Masters translated by Connellan), 4 vols., Dublin, 1846.—*Catalogus Fratrum* (yearly) of Saint Joseph's Province of Dominicans.—*Catholic Directory* (American).—*Catholic Directory* (Irish) for 1848 and 1850.—*Concilia Provincialia Baltimorae Habita ab Anno 1829 usque ad Annum 1849,* Baltimore, 1851.—O'Hart (John), *Irish Pedigrees,* Dublin, 1881; and *The Irish and Anglo-Irish Landed Gentry when Cromwell came to Ireland,* Dublin, 1892.—*Pii IX Pontificis Maximi Acta,* Vols. III, IV and V.

III. WORKS REFERRED TO OR PRINCIPALLY CONSULTED

Atlas and Cyclopedia of Ireland, by Joyce (P. W.), Sullivan (A.M.) and Nunan (P.D.), New York, 1900.—Brennan (Rev. Richard), *Lives of the Irish Martyrs and Confessors,* New York, 1879.—*Catholic Encyclopedia, passim.*—Clarke (Richard L.), *Lives of the Deceased Bishops of the Catholic Church in the United States,* 3 vols., New York, 1888.—Coleman (Rev. Ambrose), *The Ancient Dominican Foundations in Ireland,* Dundalk, 1902.—Conyngham (David P.), *Ireland, Past and Present,* New York, 1884.

De Burgo (Rev. Thomas), *Hibernia Dominicana,* Cologne, 1762.—*Diocese of Columbus, The History of Fifty Years,* Columbus, 1918.—Drane (Augusta T.), *The History of St. Dominic,* London, 1891.—Emmet (Thomas A.), *Ireland under English Rule,* 2 vols., New York-London, 1903.—Foisset (M.), *Vie du R. P. Lacordaire,* 2 vols., Paris, 1870.—*Golden Bells in Convent Towers, The Story of Father Samuel and Saint Clara,* Chicago, 1904.—Graham (B.A.), *History of Fairfield and Perry Counties, Ohio* (especially *History of Perry County,* which is by E. S. Colburn), Chicago, 1883.

Hammer (Rev. Bonaventure), *Eduard Dominik Fenwick der Apostel von Ohio,* Freiburg, 1890.—Helps (Arthur), *The Spanish Conquest in America* (Oppenheim ed.), 4 vols., New York, 1900-1904.—Houck (Rev. George B.), *The Church in Northern Ohio and in the Diocese of Cleveland,* Cleveland, 1887, 1890 and 1903 (last ed. 2 vols.).—Howe (Henry), *Historical Collections of Ohio,* Cincinnati, 1848; and same in 3 vols., Columbus, 1890-1891.—Howlett (Rev. William J.), *Historical Tribute to St. Thomas' Seminary,* Saint Louis, 1906; and *Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx,* Techny, Illinois, 1915.—Keating (Rev. Geoffrey), *The History of Ireland from the Earliest Period to the English Invasion* (translated by O'Mahony), New York, 1866.—Lamott (Rev. John H.), *History of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati,* Cincinnati, 1921.

McCann (Sister Mary Agnes), *Archbishop Purcell and the Archdiocese of Cincinnati,* Washington, 1918.—MacGeoghegan (The Abbé), *The History of Ireland, Ancient and Modern* (translated by O'Kelly), New York.—McGee (Thomas D'Arcy), *A Popular His-*

tory of Ireland from the Earliest Period, New York, 1864.—Mac Inerny (Rev. M. H.), *A History of the Irish Dominicans,* Vol. I., Dublin, 1916.—Maes (Rev. Camillus P.), *Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx,* Cincinnati, 1880.—Martzolff (Clement L.), *History of Perry County, Ohio,* Columbus, 1902.—Mazzuchelli (Rev. Samuel C.), *Memoirs Historical and Edifying of a Missionary Apostolic* (a translation of the *Memorie Istoriche ed Edificanti,* published in Milan, 1844), Chicago, 1915.—Miller (James), *Reference Book of Ireland,* New York, 1877.—Mooney (Thomas), *A History of Ireland from its First Settlement to the Present,* 2 vols., Boston, 1853.—Moore (Thomas), *The History of Ireland from the Earliest Kings of the Realm down to its Last Chief,* 2 vols., New York, 1893.—Mortier (R.P.), *Histoire des Maîtres Généraux de l'Ordre des Frères Prêcheurs,* 8 vols., Paris, 1903-1920.

O'Connor (Rev. J. B.), *Saint Dominic and the Order of Preachers,* Somerset, Ohio, 1916.—O'Daniel (Rev. V. F.), *The Friars Preacher,* Somerset, 1917; *Very Rev. Charles H. McKenna,* New York, 1917; *Right Rev. Edward D. Fenwick,* Washington-New York, 1920; and *The Dominican Lay Brother,* Washington, 1921.—O'Heyne (Rev. John), *Epilogus Chronologicus Exponens succincte Conventus et Fundationes Sacri Ordinis Praedicatorum in Regno Hyberniae* (reprinted and translated by Rev. Ambrose Coleman), Dundalk, 1902.—O'Reilly (Rev. Bernard), *Life of Pius IX,* New York, 1878.—Palmer (Rev. Raymond), *Life of Philip Thomas Howard, Cardinal of York,* London, 1867.—Parkman (Francis), *France and England in North America* (Series), 9 vols., Boston, 1899.

Spalding (Right Rev. M.J.), *Sketches of the Early Catholic Missions in Kentucky,* Louisville, 1844; and *Sketches of the Life, Times and Character of the Right Rev. Benedict Joseph Flaget,* Louisville, 1852.—Sutor (J. H.), *Past and Present of the City of Zanesville and Muskingum County, Ohio,* Chicago, 1905.—Treacy (Rev. William P.), *Irish Scholars in Penal Days,* New York, 1899.—Walsh (Rev. Thomas), *History of the Irish Hierarchy with the Monasteries of each County,* New York, 1856.—Webb (Hon. "Ben."), *The Centenary of Catholicity in Kentucky,* Louisville, 1884.

IV. PAMPHLETS, PERIODICALS AND PAPERS

The Centenary of Saint Joseph's Parish, Somerset, Ohio, Somerset, 1918.—Coffey (Rev. John F.), *The City and Diocese of London, Ontario, An Historical Sketch,* London, 1885.—Dunne (Rev. Dennis J.), *A Brief History of St. Patrick's Church, Junction City, Ohio,* Somerset, 1918.—O'Daniel (Rev. V. F.), *Historical Souvenir of the Consecration of Saint Dominic's Church, Washington, D. C.,* Baltimore, 1919.—Volz (Rev. J. R.), *A Century's Record,* Somerset, Ohio, 1905.

The *Catholic Historical Review,* April, 1918.—*The Dominican Year Book,* 1909, 1912 and 1913.—*Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia,* September, 1914.—The *Rosary Magazine, passim.*—The *Irish Rosary, passim.*

Adam, Memphis, Tennessee.—The *Catholic Advocate,* Bardstown and Louisville, Kentucky.—The *Catholic Columbian,* Columbus.—The *Catholic Telegraph,* Cincinnati.—The *Catholic Mirror,* Baltimore.—The *Freeman's Journal,* New York.—The *Nenagh News,* Nenagh, Ireland.—The *Record,* Louisville, Kentucky.

INDEX

Abell, *Rev.* Robert A., 59 n., 71; preaches Fr. O'Brien's funeral sermon in Louisville, Ky., 309
Adam (paper), cited, 200 n.
Alemany, *Most Rev.* Joseph S., O. P., 117 n., 118, 122, 123, 152
Anderson, *Rev.* Peter A., O.P., 61 n.
Angier, *Rev.* Robert A., O.P., 140
Annunciation, Church of the, Thomsonville, Ky., 159
Athassel, ruins of Dominican monastery at, 25
Atlas and Cyclopedia of Ireland, cited, 9

Badgett, *Mrs.* Mary (Osbourn), remarkable recovery of, 258
Badin, *Rev.* Stephen T., 59 n.
Baltimore Catholic Mirror, cited, 104 n.
Baltimore, Fourth Provincial Council of, 92
Bardstown, Ky., 20, 21, 27, 29 n., 30; Fr. O'Brien's arrival at, 28
Barren Co., Ky., Catholics in, 306, 307
Bawn, birthplace of Fr. O'Brien, 10, 12, 24, 120
Benedict XV, 52
Blanc, *Most Rev.* Anthony, 59 n.
Bodkin, *Rev.* Francis, O.P., 140
Bokel, *Rev.* John A., O.P., 140, 141 n.
Bowling, *Rev.* Charles Dominic, O. P., master of novices, 57, 71, 117, 118 n.
Boyle Co., Ky., Catholics in, 157
Brébeuf, *Rev.* John de, S.J., 212
Brian Boru, 2-5
Brown, Sister Catherine, O.S.D., cited, 132 n.
Brownson, Orestes A., 267, 292, 326
Bruté *Rt. Rev.* Simon Gabriel, 59
Bruyere, *Rev.* John M., 214, 215
Burke, Grace (O'Brien), 16, 120
Burke, Richard, 16
Burke, *Rev.* Thomas N., O.P., 148 n.
Byrne, *Rev.* William, founder of St. Mary's College, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 37; death of, 31

Campion, *Rev.* James, 213
Canada, early history of, 209-211
Carey, *Rev.* Bartholomew V., O.P., ordained by Bishop Spalding, 241 n.
Carroll, *Most Rev.* John, 76, 141; and the Dominicans, 77
Catholic Advocate, cited, 12 n., 17, 18 n., 29 n., 32 n., 47 n., 59 n., 60, 61 n., 72 n., 80 n., 89 n., 98, 100, 103 n., 117, 152, 153 n., 200 n., 260 n., 263, 302, 309, 312, 323, 324, 327
Catholic Almanac, cited, 148 n., 159 n.
Catholic Columbian, cited, 114 n.
Catholic Directory, cited, 6 n., 91 n., 109 n.
Catholic Encyclopedia, cited, 69 n., 300
Catholic Guardian, cited, 194 n.
Catholic Telegraph, cited, 82, 88 n., 92 n., 93, 94, 107, 108 n., 109 n., 136 n., 163, 165, 193; Fr. O'Brien's letter to editors of, 162

Catholics in remote parts of the U. S., 23
Cavanagh, "Rody," 284
Centenary of Catholicity in Kentucky, cited, 260 n.
Centenary of St. Joseph's Church, Somerset, Ohio, cited, 268
Chabrat, *Rt. Rev.,* Guy Ignatius, 59
Chatham, Ontario, 219 n., 223
Chaumont, *Rev.* Joseph, S.J., 212
Chazelle, *Rev.* Peter, S.J., 30, 31, 32
Christian Brothers, 230, 231, 232
Cincinnati, Ohio, Fr. O'Brien's visits to, 284, 295
Clark, Alexander, 87, 101, 107
Clark, *Rev.* William E., 59 n.
Clarkson, *Rev.* Sydney Albert, O.P., 64 n., 141 n.; succeeds Fr. O'Brien as prior of St. Rose's, 185, 186
Clements, Robert, 257
Coll, *Rev.* Peter C., O.P., 241 n.
Collegian, St. Joseph's College, cited, 104 n.; edited by pupils, 128
Columbus, Ohio, mission in, 281, 294
Condillac, Antoine de la Mothe, founder of Detroit, 212
Cordova, *Rev.* Pedro de, O.P., 69
Cork, Dominican Priory at, XIII
Cubero, *Rev.* Francis, O.P., 117, 137 n.; with the Confederate soldiers, 241

Dallion, *Rev.* Joseph de la Roche, O.S.F., 211-212
Daly, *Rev.* James V., O.P., 126
Danville, Ky., 157, 160 n., 188; Catholics in, 158, 159
D'Arco, *Rev.* Mannes, O.P., 117 n.
David, *Rt. Rev.* John B., 59
Davis, *Hon.* Jefferson, homage to Fr. O'Brien, 297
Derigaud, *Rev.* Father, death of, 24
Deserted Village, quoted, 116
Dignan, *Rev.* Ralph H., XIII; cited, 214 n., 219 n.; quoted, 220 n., 222 n., 226 n., 227, 231 n.
Dittoe, Jacob, 76; donates land for erection of church, 77-78
Dominican Sisters, at Springfield, Ky., 121, 148, 174, 238 n., 294 n.; at Zanesville, Ohio, 131-132; at Somerset, Ohio, 148; at Springfield, Ill., 236, 238 n.
Dominican Year Book, cited, 251
Dominicans, in Kentucky, 20, 25; first home, 251; in Ireland, 25; ceremony of receiving the habit, 40-46; in Latin America, 69-70; novitiate, 40-50; title "Order of Preachers" confirmed by Innocent III, 66-69; in Washington, D. C., 139, 141, 142, 145; in Canada, 215-232; of Ohio and Kentucky adopted dialogue, 247
Donnelly, Eleanor C., wishes to write life of Fr. O'Brien, 183; letter from Archbishop Ryan, 184
Dunne, *Rev.* Dennis J., acknowledgment to, XV; cited, 87, 101 n., 107 n., 108 n.; quoted, 115-116
Durbin, *Rev.* Elisha J., 59 n., 71

Eccleston, *Most Rev.* Samuel, 107-108
Edelen, *Rev.* James V., O.P., 141 n.
Egan, *Rev.* Constantine L., O.P., 114 n.; chaplain in northern armies, 242 n.
England, misgovernment and oppression of Ireland by, 13-15
Evans, Oliver, inventor of steam propelled vehicle, 21, 22 n.
Evremond, *Rev.* F. X., S.J., 59 n.

Faunt, *Rev.* Thomas P., O.P., ordained by Bishop Spalding, 241 n.
Fenwick, *Rt. Rev.* Benedict J., S.J., 110 n.
Fenwick, *Rt. Rev.* Edward Dominic, O.P., first bishop of Cincinnati,

26, 33, 71, 88, 84, 134; in Ohio, 76-78, 135; consecrated bishop, 78; revered and imitated by Fr. O'Brien, 247
Fenwick, *Rev.* John C., O.P., 140
Finck, David, 90 n.
Finck, *Mrs.* David, 90 n.
Finck, James, 90 n.
Finck, John, 75, 76
Flaget, *Rt. Rev.* Benedict J., bishop of Louisville, 20, 21, 23, 24, 30, 47 n., 59, 77
Flood, *Rev.* Eugene V., O.P., 187 n.
Flowers, Alexander, 90 n.
Flowers, Charles, 90 n.
Franklin, Ky., mission in, 307
Freeman's Journal, cited, 12 n., 17, 19 n., 24 n., 26 n., 27, 29 n., 32 n., 37 n., 60 n., 61 n., 63, 73 n., 80, 100 n., 123 n., 147 n., 232, 252 n., 294 n.; quoted, 197, 317

Gallon, James, 203
Garrard Co., Ky., Catholics in, 157
Georgetown College, Washington, D. C., 142
Gettings, Hilary, 177
Gibbons, James Cardinal, quoted, 141
Glasgow, Ky., Catholics in, 306, 307
Great Britain, *see* England

Hagerstown, Md., mission in, 140
Hamilton, Ontario, Sisters of St. Joseph, 229, 230
Harper, *Rev.* Thomas, 111
Harrodsburg, Ky., 157, 246; Catholics in, 158; first church, 159, 198
Hayes, President Rutherford B., anecdote of, 75
Hazeltine, *Rev.* Joseph, 59 n.
Heaney, *Rev.* James P., O.P., 241
Hennessy, *Most Rev.* John, 181
Hickey, *Brother* Anthony, O.P., cited, 319
Higgins, *Rev.* Arthur V., O.P., cited 29 n., 89 n., 117 n., 310 n., 319, 326; quoted, 152, 260, 302, 308-309, 310, 311, 323, 324, 325, 326, 327
Hill's *Practical Reference Library of General Knowledge,* quoted, 22 n.
"Hippodrome War," 149-150
Hogan, John, 16
Hogan, Margaret (O'Brien), 16
Holy Rosary Church, Manton (now Blincoe), Ky., 157, 198

Indians in Canada, 211-213
Innocent III, *see* Dominicans
Ireland, divisions of, 1; early government of, 1-6; introduction of surnames in, 5; misgoverned by England, 13; penal years, 14; Catholic education in, 14-15; Dominicans in, 25

Jesuits, *see* Society of Jesus
Jackson, James, 200 n.
Jackson, *Dr.* John, 199, 200
Jandel, *Most Rev.* Alexander Vincent, O.P., 122; cited 138 n., 139 n.
Jarboe, *Rev.* Joseph T., O.P., 71, 200 n.; captured during Civil War, 241 n.
Jaynes, *Mrs.* Mary B., 174, 175, 176
Josepha, *Sister,* O.S.D., remarkable cure of, 259
Juncker, *Rt. Rev.* Henry D., bishop of Alton, Ill., 171

Keely, W., architect of St. Rose's Church, 197
Kelly, *Rev.* Joseph A., O.P., provincial, 215, 217; letter to Bishop Pinsonneault quoted, 218, 242 n.
Kenrick, *Most Rev.* Francis P., 141, 142 n.; death of, 240 n.

Kenrick, *Most Rev.* Peter R., 180
Kennedy, *Rt. Rev.* Patrick, 119
Kent, *Rev.* John C., O.P., 219 n.
Kent, *Mother* Agnes, O.S.U., 219 n.; cited, 223
Kentucky, Catholic Church in, 20-21, 23, 24, 25, 31 n.
Kernan, *Mrs.* Matthew (McKinley), 90 n.
Kintz, Charles, 90 n.
Know-Nothing Party, 175

Ladies of the Sacred Heart, school in London, Ontario, 228, 229, 230
Lanigan, *Sister* Dominica, O.S.D., 294 n.
Las Casas, *Rev.* Bartolomé de, O.P., 69
Lavialle, *Rt. Rev.* Peter J., bishop of Louisville, Ky., 250, 251, 252, 259; consecrated bishop, 249; death of, 254
Lilly, *Rev.* Hugh F., O.P., cited, 32 n., 100 n., 110 n., 151 n., 284, 310 n., 311 n., 312, 319, 323, 326; funeral sermon over Fr. O'Brien quoted, 205, 263, 274, 283, 297, 304, 305, 306-307, 312-314, 320, 321, 322; first meeting with Fr. O'Brien, 206
Logan Co., Ky., mission in, 307
London, Ontario, Indian settlement, 212; Catholics in, 213, 214, 217; Fr. O'Brien pastor at, 218-232
Louisville, Ky., parish offered to Dominicans in, 145-147; Jubilee in, 193-194; visit of Bishop Spalding, 194; Fr. O'Brien arrested in Civil War at, 239, 284-285; Diocese of, 243, 246 n.; Fr. O'Brien in, 249-252, 259, 289, 297, 302, 307; Catholics in, 249; Fr. O'Brien's last visit, 307, 308
Lynch, *Rev.* John H., O.P., 241 n.

McAllister, *Rev.* Peter T., O.P., acknowledgment to, XV, XVI
McCann, *Sister* Mary Agnes, cited, 125 n.
McCloskey, *Rt. Rev.* William G., affection for Fr. O'Brien, 302-303, 304; last visit of Fr. O'Brien to, 327
Macdonnell, *Rt. Rev.* Alexander, titular bishop of Rhosina, 213
McGovern, *Rev.* James B., O.P., recollections of Fr. O'Brien, 243-245; cited, 310 n., 326
McGrath, James, 16
McGrath, *Rev.* Matthew F., O.P., nephew of Fr. O'Brien, 16, 121 n.
McGreevy, John, letter from, 112-114
McKenna, *Rev.* Charles H., O.P., 183 n.; cited, 319
McLain, *Mrs.* Edward, 202 n.
McManus, *Rev.* Hugh J., O.P., acknowledgment to, XVI
McMaster, James A., 292, 326
McNicholas, *Rt. Rev.* John T., O.P., bishop of Duluth, 183, 184; letter of, 318-320
Madden, Catherine, 17
Mandonnet, *Rev.* Peter, O.P., 69 n.
Manton, Ky., 157, 198, 202, 246; Catholics in, 160
Martin, *Rev.* Thomas H., O.P., 88
Mazzuchelli, *Rev.* Samuel C., O.P., 84; founder of St. Dominic's College, 128
Meagher, *Rev.* Denis J., O.P., cousin of Fr. O'Brien, 121 n.; succeeds Fr. O'Brien at Louisville, 252
Meagher, Grace, mother of Fr. O'Brien, 11, 18
Meagher, *Rev.* James R., O.P., cousin of Fr. O'Brien, 121 n.
Meagher, Martin, uncle of Fr. O'Brien, 19
Meagher, *Sister* Mary Josephine,

O.S.D., 121; recollections of Fr. O'Brien, 286-288
Meagher family, 6-7
Medley, George, 258
Mercer Co., Ky., Catholics in, 157
Miles, *Rt. Rev.* Richard P., O.P., first bishop of Nashville, 37, 39, 41, 65, 71, 139, 151, 162; provincial, 54; consecrated bishop, 58-60
Montesinos, *Rev.* Antonio de, O.P., 69
Montgomery, *Rev.* Charles Pius, O.P., 79, 122
Montgomery, *Rev.* Samuel L., O.P., 70, 242 n.
Montgomery, *Rev.* Stephen H., O.P., 59 n.
Mullican, William, 73; recollections of Fr. O'Brien, 260-262
Muños, *Rev.* Raphael, O.P., St. Thomas' College closed by, 32, 127
Murphy, *Rev.* William S., S.J., 136

Nealis, *Rev.* John T., O.P., 242 n.
Nelson Record, quoted, 154 n.
Nenagh, Ireland, 15, 16, 119, 120; description of, 9-10
Nenagh News, cited, 10 n., 11, 16, 17, 18, 19 n., 20, 22, 119, 120, 121, 253 n., 285 n.
New Orleans, La., Fr. O'Brien visits, 19, 20, 110, 178, 198, 244; Fr. O'Brien invades gambling dens in, 279-280
New York City, Fr. O'Brien visits, 110, 229; missions in, 293-294
Nicholas, *Sister* Mary Pius, O.S.D., cited, 132 n.
Noon, John, 101 n.
Noon, *Mrs.* John, 101 n.
Noon, *Rev.* Philip D., O.P., president of St. Joseph's College, 162
Norton, *Sister* Theresa, O.S.D., 282

O'Brien, *Brother* Anthony, O.P., *see* O'Brien, *Rev.* Matthew A.
O'Brien, *Rev.* Charles C., a cousin, 17
O'Brien, Daniel, a brother, 17, 120, 121
O'Brien, Denis, a brother, 16
O'Brien, *Rev.* Denis, a cousin, 121 n.
O'Brien, Grace, a sister, *see* Burke, Grace (O'Brien)
O'Brien, John, father of Matthew, 11-12
O'Brien, Margaret, a sister, *see* Hogan, Margaret (O'Brien)
O'Brien, *Rev.* Matthew A., O.P., lineage, 2-7; birth, 12; early education, 15; vocation, 17-18; comes to America, 19; hardships endured in travels, 21-23, 80-81; joins Society of Teaching Brothers, 24; candidate for priesthood, 25; goes to St. Rose's Priory, 26; health fails, 27; student and professor at St. Mary's College, 27-37; compared to St. Ignatius, 32; receives Dominican habit, 38, 40-42; becomes Brother Anthony, 39; novitiate, 42-50, 53; becomes a Dominican, 54-61; early priesthood, 62-73; master of novices at St. Rose's, 63; goes to Ohio, 80; anecdotes, 81, 226-227; master of novices at St. Joseph's, 82-85; compared to Jean-Baptiste Vianney, 99; visit to Ireland, 118; provincial of St. Joseph's Province, 123-153; bravery of, 149-155; prior and pastor of St. Rose's, Ky., 154-184; kindness to colored slaves, 169, 175, 187; revered by non-Catholics, 170, 175, 176, 180-182, 201-202, 224, 243-244, 261, 262, 282, 283, 311; attributed unusual powers, 171-182, 200-201, 202, 208, 257-259, 271, 282; escape from death, 179; at St. Louis, Mo., 110,

180-183, 184; during the Civil War, 239, 243, 284-285, 295; procurator at St. Rose's, 185, 248, 250; personal appearance, 96-97, 189, 190, 191, 223, 243, 245, 289, 323, 324; attacked by Dr. John Jackson, 199-200; extraordinary conversions, 93, 220, 221, 283, 285, 293; in London, Ontario, 218-232; builds school in London, Ontario, 229; visits St. Patrick's Church, Cincinnati, 237-238; compared to Archbishop Hughes, 243-244; at Louisville, Ky., 249-254, 297, 302, 307; strange sick-calls, 256-259, 281, 296; sermons, 264-265, 266, 268, 269, 292, 303; missions in all parts of U. S., 269, 302; invasion of gambling dens in New Orleans, 279-280; last years, 287-303; parochial missions, 289-303; preaches jubilee, 301-302; last sick-call, 306; illness and death, 307-308; funeral services, 309-317; tribute from Bishop McNicholas, 318-320; character study of, 318-328; correspondence of: to Archbishop Purcell, 103, 125, 137; to Bishop Spalding, 145, 146-147, 158, 159, 161, 240; to editors of *Catholic Telegraph,* 162; to Bishop Pinsonneault, 230-231; to E. O. Walker, 242; *see also* St. Rose's Priory; St. Thomas of Aquin College; St. Patrick's Church, Perry Co., Ohio; temperance societies

O'Brien of Ara, 10-11

O'Brien, Philip, a brother, 17

O'Brien, *Rt. Rev.* Terence Albert, O.P., bishop of Emly, martyr, 25

O'Brien family, history of, 5-7, 10-12

O'Carroll, *Rt. Rev.* William D., O.P., 128 n.; cited, 214 n., 231 n., 251

O'Connor, *Very Rev.* Ambrose, 119

O'Daniel, *Mrs.* Josephine, remarkable recovery of, 258

O'Daniel, *Rev.,* V.F., O.P., *Life of Rt. Rev. Edward D. Fenwick,* cited, 26, 76 n., 77 n., 78 n., 140 n., 141 n., 160 n.; *Life of Very Rev. Charles H. McKenna,* quoted, 55; *History of St. Dominic's Church,* cited, 140 n., 145 n., 147 n.; letter from Bishop McNicholas, 318-320

O'Meara, Michael, writer, 11, 12, 19 n., 20, 22

O'Reilly, *Rt. Rev. Msgr.* Bernard, quoted, 297, 299

Orengo, *Rev.* Aloysius, O.P., 117 n.

Orukter Amphibolos, *see* Evans, Oliver

Osbourn, Mary, *see* Badgett, *Mrs.* Mary (Osbourn)

Osbourn, Parker, 173, 258

Parke, Ephraim J., 229 n.

Perry Co., Ohio, description of, 74-76; missions in, 84, 99, 113, 148, 198; Catholics in, 86, 87, 88, 89 n., 90 n., 93-94, 95, 96, 109, 114, 115, 123, 182

Philadelphia, Pa., Diocese of, 141, 184; mission in, 294

Pinsonneault, *Rt. Rev.* Peter A., 217, 219, 229, 231; head of Diocese of London, Ontario, 214; offers cathedral parish to the Dominicans, 215, 231; letter from Fr. O'Brien, 230-231

Piscataway, Md., Fr. E. D. Fenwick, O.P., pastor, 140

Pius IX, 52, 53, 122; Jubilee, 193-194, 300; *Pontificis Maximi Acta,* cited, 298, 299; Encyclical, cited, 299; Syllabus of Errors, 299; Bull, *Aeterni Patris,* 300; Vatican Council, 299-300; *Acta Sanctae Sedis,* cited, 300

Pius X, 52, 222
Pleasant Run (now Simms), Ky., Catholics in, 158, 160, 246
Polin, *Dr.* John, 168
Polin, *Rev.* Thomas J., O.P., 37, 38 n., 63, 64, 65; master of novices, 46-48; death of, 57; tribute to, 313
Pottsville, Ky., Catholics in, 200
Powers, *Rev.* Thomas A., traditions of Fr. O'Brien, 266, 292; quoted, 267; cited, 326
Pozzo, *Rev.* Eugene H., O.P., 79, 117 n.
Purcell, *Most Rev.* John B., 78, 82, 100, 104, 122 n., 136, 137, 138, 240, 241 n.; quoted, 93-94, 148; letters from Fr. O'Brien, 103, 125, 137, 152

Ralph, *Rev.* Hubert P., O.P., 215, 219; letter to Bishop Pinsonneault quoted, 218
Ray, *Dr.* Wm. W., 155; poem of quoted, 154, 216
Raywick, Ky., Fr. O'Brien at, 252
Record, The, Louisville, Ky., cited, 59
Rehoboth, Ohio, new church, 94, 109; Catholics in, 101, 132
Richardie, *Rev.* Armand de la, S.J., 212
Rochford, *Rev.* John A., O.P., 124 n., 215, 218, 219, 229
Rogers, *Mrs.* Frances Jaynes, 201 n.
Rooney, *Rev.* James A., O.P., 240, 241 n.
Rosary Magazine, cited, 9 n.
Rosati, *Rt. Rev.* Joseph, 59
Rosecrans, *Rt. Rev.* Sylvester H., 148 n., 294
Roscrea, home of the Meaghers, 6
Rothheut, *Rev.* H. J., 160 n.
Rush Creek, Ohio, Catholics on, 87, 101, 110 n.
Russell, *Rev.* Bartholomew, O.P., XIII
Russellville, Ky., Catholics in, 307
Ryan, Honora, 16
Ryan, *Rev.* Joseph T., O.P., 17, 155, 157, 186, 188; cited, 159 n.; at Louisville, Ky., 251
Ryan, *Most Rev.* Francis P., archbishop of Philadelphia, 181, 182, 183, 294; letter to Eleanor C. Donnelly, 184

St. Barnabas' Church, Deavertown, Morgan Co., Ohio, 148
St. Bernard's Church, Corning, Ohio, 148 n.
St. Catherine's Academy, Springfield, Ky., 121, 131, 174, 259
St. Columba's Academy, Zanesville, Ohio, 132
St. Dominic's College, at Sinsinawa, Wisconsin, 128
St. Dominic's Church, Rehoboth, Ohio, 134-135
St. Dominic's Church, Springfield, Ky., 157, 198
St. Dominic's Church, Washington, D. C., 139, 140 n., 141, 142, 145
St. Francis' Church (Sunday Creek), Perry Co., Ohio, 148
St. Hyacinth, Dominican province in Canada, 215 n.
St. Ivo's Church, Pleasant Run, Ky., 160 n.
St. John the Evangelist's Church, Chauncey, Athens Co., Ohio, 148
St. Joseph's Church and Convent, Perry Co., Ohio, pioneer structures, 78, 81-84, 86, 87; made novitiate, 79; new priory, 108-109, 110; miracle attributed to Fr. O'Brien at, 282
St. Joseph's College, Somerset, Ohio, 109, 117 n., 118, 123, 127-128
St. Joseph's College and Seminary,

Bardstown, Ky., 20, 30
St. Louis, Mo., Fr. O'Brien visits, 110, 180-183, 184, 198
St. Louis Bertrand's Church, Rehoboth, Ohio, 132
St. Louis Bertrand's Church, Louisville, Ky., erection of, 250-251, 252; Fr. O'Brien's last farewell, 307; funeral ceremonies for Fr. O'Brien, 308-310
St. Mary's Church (now St. Andrew's), Harrodsburg, Ky., 159, 198
St. Mary's Academy, Somerset, Ohio, 131, 148
St. Mary's College, Marion Co., Ky., 20; Fr. O'Brien at, 27-34, 37 n.
St. Patrick's Church, Cincinnati, Ohio, 236
St. Patrick's Church, Danville, Ky., 160 n.
St. Patrick's Church, Junction City, Ohio, Fr. O'Brien pastor, 86-116, 123, 203, 244
Sts. Peter and Paul's Church, Danville, Ky., 160 n.
St. Peter's Vicariate, Memphis, Tenn., 188; proposed as convent, 138
St. Peter's Church, London, Ontario, 214; offered to the Dominicans, 215; Fr. O'Brien at, 219-231
St. Peter's Church (Monday Creek), Perry Co., Ohio, 148
St. Peter's Church, Steubenville, Ohio, 266
St. Pius' Church, South Fork Creek, Ohio, 185
St. Rose's Church and Priory, Springfield, Ky., 20; history of, 25-26; Fr. O'Brien at, 26-27, 32, 39, 48, 58, 59, 60, 64 n., 71, 79, 80, 126, 155-178, 245, 247, 248, 250, 254, 261-262, 270, 287-288, 302, 304, 306; Fr. O'Brien buried at, 310-317; construction of new church, 135, 197, 244-245; dedication of new church, 161-165; poem on by Dr. Wm. W. Ray, 154, 216
St. Thomas of Aquin College, Springfield, Ky., 20, 25, 32; Fr. O'Brien reopens college, 127, 128, 131, 188
St. Thomas' Church, Zanesville, Ohio, 122, 131, 138, 139; consecrated by Archbishop Purcell, 136; place proposed as priory, 137-138
Sandwich, Ontario, seat of diocese transferred to, 214; transferred back to London, 231; Dominicans in, 218, 227, 232
Savannah, Georgia, Fr. O'Brien visits, 19, 20, 27; mass at, 19
Scallan, Thomas, 90 n.
Scallan, *Mrs.* Thomas, 90 n.
Scott, Martin, 90; recollections of Fr. O'Brien, 275-278
Scott, *Mrs.* Martin, 90 n.
Seton, *Mother*, Daughters of, *see* Sisters of Charity
Sheridan, Gen. Philip H., meetings with Fr. O'Brien, 295
Simms, Thomas, 73, 172
Sinsinawa, Wisconsin, College of St. Dominic affiliated with St. Joseph's Province, 128
Sisters of Charity, 229-230
Sisters of St. Joseph, promise to help Fr. O'Brien in Ontario, 229, 230, 231
Society of Jesus, in Kentucky, 30; takes charge of St. Mary's College, 30-31, 33
Society of Teaching Brothers, 23-24, 26
Somerset, Ohio, Catholics in, 91, 126 n., 203; building new church, 94; disturbances in, 99, 149-150

Somerset Press, cited, 74 n.
Souharisen, Indian (Neutrals) chief, 212
South Fork Creek, Perry Co., Ohio, building new church, 109, 185
Spalding, *Rev.* Benedict J., 161, 162
Spalding, *Most Rev.* Martin J., bishop of Louisville, cited, 28, 26 n., 31 n., 59 n., 164, 239; ill health of, 136; letters from Fr. O'Brien, 145, 146-147, 158, 159, 161, 240; quoted, 240-241; friendship for Fr. O'Brien, 248-249
Spare, Thomas D., architect of St. Patrick's Church, 108
Springfield, Ky., educational institutions near, 20; court days at, 168
Springfield, Ill., mother-house of Dominican Sisters in, 286, 288 n.
Stretch, John J., 164 n., 186 n.; recollections of Fr. O'Brien, 188-190
Surnames, introduced into Ireland, 5

Temperance societies, Fr. O'Brien's work for, 92
Thomas, Abel, 172
Thomsonville (now Fenwick), Ky., Catholics in, 158; Church of the Annunciation dedicated, 159; religious controversy, 160
Timon, *Rt. Rev.* John, 59
Toomyvara, home of Fr. O'Brien's mother, 11, 19
Troy, *Most Rev.* John T., O.P., archbishop of Dublin, 77 n.
Tuite, *Rev.* Wm. R., O.P., 25; death of, 87
Turner, *Rev.* Jeremiah P., O.P., 141 n.

Van Den Broek, *Rev.* John T., O.P., 84
Vilarrasa, *Rev.* Francis S., O.P., 91 n., 110 n., 122, 128
Villana, *Sister* Mary, O.S.D., recollections of Fr. O'Brien, 174-177

Walker, Eugene O., letter from Fr. O'Brien, 242; cited, 310 n.
Walker, *Mrs.* Mattie (McIvoy), 242
Walker, *Rev.* Osman A., O.P., 82
Walsh, *Rt. Rev.* John, 214; succeeds Bishop Pinsonneault in Diocese of London, Ontario, 231
Washington, D. C., *see* Dominicans in
Washington Co., Kentucky, 20; Catholics in, 156, 163, 247
Webb, *Hon.* Ben., cited 31 n., 159 n., 160 n.; quoted 259-260
Whelan, *Rt. Rev.* James, O.P., 91 n.; succeeds Fr. O'Brien as provincial, 155, 156
White, *Rev.* Robert A., O.P., 189 n.
Wilburn, *Rev.* James S., O.P., acknowledgment to, XV
Wilson, *Rev.* George A., O.P., 33; cited, 19 n., 21 n., 26 n., 29 n., 37 n., 38 n., 79, 142, 146; quoted, 232; dialogues with Fr. O'Brien, 247
Wilson, *Mrs.* Nellie (Sheridan), 295 n.
Wilson, *Rev.* Samuel T., O.P., 135
Wood, *Most Rev.* James F., archbishop of Philadelphia, 162, 286; quoted, 163; receives Fr. O'Brien, 294

Young, *Rev.* Nicholas D., O.P., 71, 77, 79, 83, 86 n., 88, 91 n., 140
Young, *Rev.* Nicholas R., O.P., 140, 239 n.

Zanesville, Ohio, 82, 117 n., 122; completion of church, 186, 187

Date Due

MAR 2 8

7707 922.273
O'B63
O'Daniel, Victor Francis
AUTHOR
An American Apostle, The Very
TITLE Reverend Matthew Anthony
O'Brien, O. P.
73